

Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Long Term Care Planning among Older Adults

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INTRODUCTION

With increasing health needs, hospitalizations, and unmet support, it often becomes imperative to move into Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) or Long Term Care (LTC) settings. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced many new challenges in LTC (e.g., high morbidity and mortality, visitor limitations). We sought to examine how COVID-19 affected older adult perceptions about planning to move into SNF or LTC settings.

METHODS

The PlanYourLifespan (PYL)-LitCog study examines the longitudinal LTC decision-making processes among a cohort of adults ages 65 years and older. PlanYourLifespan.org is a planning tool that has been shown to be effective in helping older adults learn about LTC options and to facilitate planning. Subjects were surveyed at baseline (BL), administered PYL, then surveyed at 1 and 6-months.

Participants were asked about whether they had contemplated or made decisions about their LTC planning in the event of AD and if so, to describe the decisions. Responses were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach with open-ended responses were coded by three coders using constant comparative analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1. Participant Characteristics by Wave

Variable	Wave 1 N= 283	Wave 2 N=145
Age, M (SD)	72.9 (5.1)	73.2 (5.0)
Sex, %		
Male	27.2	24.8
Female	72.8	75.2
Race %		
Black	29.1	24.8
White	60.3	63.5
Other	10.6	11.7
Education, %		
HS or less	14.2	11.7
Some College	19.2	17.2
College Graduate	21.3	25.5
Graduate Degree	45.4	45.5
Income, %		
< \$10,000	4.8	3.6
\$10,000-\$24,999	13.2	8.7
\$25,000-49,999	25.7	26.8
>= \$50,000	56.3	60.9
Marital Status, %		
Married	45.7	48.0
Unmarried/Widowed	54.3	52.0
Total # Comorbidities, M (SD)	2.3 (1.5)	2.2 (1.3)
Living Alone, %		
Yes	41.8	42.8
No	58.2	57.2
Cognitive Impairment, %		
No impairment	76.3	77.9
MCI or Dementia	23.7	22.1
Employment Status, %		
Working for Pay	28.7	25.5
Retired/Unemployed	71.3	74.5

The COVID-19 pandemic deeply affected older adult views of Long Term Care (LTC).

In the early stages of COVID-19, participants expressed an:

- unwillingness to stay in a nursing home;
- considered moving in with family; and
- increased preference for in-home care.

In later phases of COVID-19, they expressed a:

- decreased unease in moving into LTC; and
- persistent wariness about SNFs

Older adults' views about LTC are dependent on current events.

RESULTS CONT.

Two waves of surveys were completed to denote early and later COVID-19 pandemic stages:

Wave 1: April 2020 - August 2021, N= 283

Wave 2: August - November 2021, N = 145

Wave 1 – Qualitative Results

Four major themes emerged: (1) Changing SNF preferences; (2) Acceptability of living with family in the long-term; (3) Home preferences; and (4) Preference for in-home help.

Wave 2 – Quantitative Results

- 35.9% (n=52) felt uncomfortable moving into independent living or retirement community for LTC
- 60.7% (n= 88) felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable entering a SNF for sub-acute rehabilitation

DISCUSSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, older adults expressed a wide range of perceptions about future living in SNFs and LTC facilities in the future. Initially, older adults were opposed to moving into LTC but over time, they expressed more comfort. There are still subjects who feel uncomfortable about short-term stays in SNFs. Further study is needed to examine if these beliefs change as the pandemic evolves

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