Problem and Change Needed:
An important challenge of 21st Century America is the aging of the population and the resultant increase in the number of chronically ill persons. More than 22 million people nationwide provide informal care for an aged family member in the home. Caregivers who live in rural areas face additional challenges due to fewer transportation options, limited access to medical professionals, lower incomes, and fewer support systems. The negative effects of long-term caregiving have resulted in the need for more effective implementation of evidence-based programs to improve caregiver outcomes.

Evidence:
Considerable descriptive and intervention research regarding the process of caring for elders and chronically ill persons has been conducted over the past two decades. Recent research suggests that these caregivers can become more comfortable in their role with less detriment to their health.

Strategy and Practice Change:
This project implemented an interdisciplinary state-wide caregiver education program through a University Extension system. The caregiver program included a 2-3 day interdisciplinary workshop with a manual where caregiving strategies were discussed and hands-on demonstrations were held.

Evaluation:
Over 250 predominately rural caregivers were assessed pre and post the workshop and at 3 and 6 months follow-up for changes in their caregiving knowledge and skills, involvement, reactions to caregiving and quality of life.

Results:
Results suggest local caregiver workshops are an effective method of providing information and skill building to caregivers. Workshops are mostly attended by those providing lower levels of care and have other than spousal affiliation with the care recipient. Knowledge and skills and quality of life were improved in all groups of caregivers.

Recommendations for Further Work/Lessons Learned:
Further mechanisms for ongoing caregiver support need to be developed. Rural caregivers need an improved support system that is designed to help them address the multiple clinical, functional, and social issues of their care recipient and maintain their well-being with ongoing access to appropriate preventive, acute, and long-term services.

Bibliography:

