Concurrent Session 10: Behavioural Nutrition

Depression, nutritional risk and eating behaviour in older carers

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Background – Increased levels of depression and adverse mood states can result in poor dietary practices.
Objective – To investigate the relationship between depression, mood and dietary intake in a sample of older carers.
Design – Participants were community dwelling carers recruited from carer agencies in Victoria. In a cross sectional design, a questionnaire distributed by mail to individuals over the age of 50 yr collected self reported information on depression (Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS-15)), nutritional risk (Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA)) and appetite using the Appetite, Hunger and Sensory Perception questionnaire.
Outcomes – Of the 314 carers, 76 (24%) (34 male, 41 female) participants completed the questionnaire with a mean (SD) age of 70.3 (1.9) yr. The average amount of time spent caring each week was 101 (8.5) hr. The mean BMI of carers was 27.2 (4.8) kg/m^2, with 29% classified as normal weight, 36% as overweight and 22% as obese. Overall, 88% of participants were classified as having mild or moderate depression. The MNA classified 21% as at risk of malnutrition. When stressed, 18% reported they ate more, 58% the same and 17% ate less. Twenty-one per cent reported their appetite was fair/bad/very bad.
Conclusion – A significant proportion of community dwelling older carers were depressed, at risk of malnutrition and had poor appetites, although the majority were overweight or obese.