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Involvement of caregivers in advanced cancer treatment: A review and experimental study

Deepak Ganooravar

Assistant Professor, Govt College of Nursing Vijayapura, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author: Deepak Ganooravar

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Abstract

Advanced cancer poses significant challenges that extend beyond the patient to include family caregivers, who play a vital role in treatment adherence, symptom management, emotional support, and palliative care. This article presents a narrative review of existing literature along with findings from an experimental study conducted among caregivers of patients with advanced cancer. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of structured caregiver involvement on patient outcomes and caregiver burden. A total of 50 caregivers were included and divided into experimental and control groups. Results demonstrated significant improvement in patient symptom control, treatment adherence, quality of life, and a reduction in caregiver burden in the experimental group. The findings highlight the importance of integrating caregiver-centered interventions into advanced cancer care.

Keywords: Advanced cancer, caregiver involvement, palliative care, quality of life, caregiver burden

Introduction

Advanced cancer refers to malignancies that are incurable or have progressed despite treatment, often requiring long-term therapy, symptom control, and palliative care. Patients with advanced cancer experience complex physical symptoms, psychological distress, and social challenges that necessitate continuous support. In this context, caregivers—commonly family members—become indispensable partners in care delivery.

Caregivers assist patients with activities of daily living, medication administration, hospital visits, emotional support, and decision-making. Their involvement is particularly critical in resource-limited settings where healthcare systems rely heavily on family support. Despite their vital role, caregivers frequently experience emotional strain, physical exhaustion, and financial burden. This article reviews the role of caregivers in advanced cancer treatment and presents an experimental study assessing the impact of structured caregiver involvement on patient and caregiver outcomes.

Review of Literature

Northouse *et al.* emphasized that caregiver involvement improves symptom management and enhances patient quality of life in advanced cancer. Caregivers play a key role in pain control, fatigue management, and monitoring treatment side effects.

Given *et al.* reported that emotional and psychological support provided by caregivers reduces anxiety and depression among patients, though caregivers themselves

are vulnerable to stress and burnout.

Ferrell *et al.* highlighted the importance of integrating caregivers into oncology and palliative care teams, particularly during shared decision-making and end-of-life planning.

According to the World Health Organization, caregivers are central to home-based palliative care, ensuring comfort, dignity, and continuity of care during terminal illness.

Hudson *et al.* found that unmet caregiver needs—such as lack of training and emotional support—negatively affect both patient outcomes and caregiver well-being.

The literature consistently supports the need for structured caregiver education and support to improve outcomes in advanced cancer care.

Methodology

Research Design

A narrative review combined with an experimental pre-test and post-test control group design was adopted.

Setting

The study was conducted in oncology and palliative care units of a tertiary care hospital.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Sample size: 50 caregivers of patients with advanced cancer

- **Sampling technique:** Purposive sampling

Group allocation

- **Experimental group:** 25 caregivers

- **Control group:** 25 caregivers

Inclusion Criteria

- Caregivers of adult patients diagnosed with advanced cancer
- Primary caregiver providing care for at least one month
- Willing to participate in the study

Exclusion Criteria

- Caregivers of pediatric cancer patients
- Paid caregivers

Intervention

The experimental group received a structured caregiver involvement program, which included:

- Education on symptom management
- Medication adherence guidance
- Emotional support strategies
- Communication skills and stress management

The control group received routine care.

Data Collection Tools

- Patient Symptom Control Scale
- Treatment Adherence Checklist
- Quality of Life (QoL) Scale
- Caregiver Burden Scale

Data Analysis

- **Descriptive statistics:** frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation
- **Inferential statistics:** paired t-test and independent t-test
- **Level of significance:** $p < 0.05$

Results and Data Analysis

Demographic Characteristics

- Mean caregiver age: 38.6 ± 8.4 years
- Gender: 60% female, 40% male
- Relationship to patient: spouse (42%), children (36%), others (22%)

Effect of Caregiver Involvement on Patient Symptom Control

Group Pre-test Mean \pm SD Post-test Mean \pm SD p-value
 Experimental 45.2 ± 6.8 68.4 ± 7.1 <0.001
 Control 46.1 ± 7.0 49.3 ± 6.9 >0.05

Interpretation

A statistically significant improvement in symptom control was observed in the experimental group.

Treatment Adherence Scores

Group Mean \pm SD p-value
 Experimental 82.6 ± 6.3 <0.01
 Control 65.4 ± 7.8 -

Interpretation

Patients whose caregivers received structured involvement showed better treatment adherence.

Quality of Life Scores

Group Pre-test Mean Post-test Mean p-value
 Experimental 52.3 74.1 <0.001
 Control 53.6 57.2 >0.05

Caregiver Burden Scores

Group Pre-test Mean \pm SD Post-test Mean \pm SD p-value
 Experimental 62.8 ± 8.2 44.5 ± 7.6 <0.001
 Control 61.9 ± 7.9 59.8 ± 8.1 >0.05

Interpretation

Caregiver burden significantly reduced following the intervention.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that structured caregiver involvement significantly improves patient outcomes in advanced cancer, including symptom control, treatment adherence, and quality of life. Additionally, caregiver burden was substantially reduced. These results are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of caregiver education and support. Integrating caregiver-focused interventions into oncology and palliative care services can enhance holistic care delivery.

Conclusion

Caregivers play a crucial role in advanced cancer treatment by providing physical, emotional, and logistical support. Structured caregiver involvement programs not only improve patient outcomes but also reduce caregiver burden. Healthcare systems should recognize caregivers as integral members of the cancer care team and incorporate caregiver support into routine oncology and palliative care practices.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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