

Quality of Life of Family Caregivers and Challenges Faced in Caring for Patients With Lung Cancer

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Family caregivers (FCGs) of patients with lung cancer face multiple challenges that affect their quality of life and well-being. Whether challenged physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually, distress in one area may compound challenges in other areas. To maintain function and health of FCGs as they provide valuable care for the health and well-being of the patient, attention must be given to the needs of FCGs for support and education. The purpose of this article is to describe the multifaceted challenges that FCGs of patients with lung cancer experience using case studies selected from a National Cancer Institute–funded program project. The cases are discussed in terms of how the FCG’s quality of life is impacted by the caregiver role, as well as how stressors in one or more domains of quality of life compound difficulties in coping with the demands of the role. The importance of the oncology nurse’s assessment of FCGs’ needs for support, education, and self-care through the lung cancer illness trajectory is discussed while presenting accessible community resources to meet those needs.

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Lung cancer is the second most common cancer and the number one cause of death in the United States, with the more than 200,000 cases diagnosed each year accounting for 14% of all new cancer cases (American Cancer Society, 2011a; Siegel, Naishadham, & Jemal, 2012). Recommended treatment can be complex with surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy alone or in combination. Symptom burden of the disease or treatment is profound and impacts the patient as well as the family caregiver (FCG) who supports the patient.

FCGs face multiple challenges throughout the illness trajectory, evolving over time from the initial diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, throughout treatment, to living with the potential for disease progression and end-of-life care. Each FCG brings his or her own life experience, coping abilities, and support systems to the role, as well as physical, psychological, social, and spiritual strengths and weaknesses. How FCGs respond to the challenges of their roles impacts their ability to continue care for their family member through the illness trajectory. Antici-

pating, assessing, and addressing the challenges of the FCG are integral to caring for and supporting the patient. The oncology nurse must address the FCG’s needs throughout the illness trajectory to support the health and well-being of the patient with lung cancer as well as his or her caregiver.

Examining lung cancer’s impact on a FCG’s quality of life (QOL) is one way to better understand the experience and assess the challenges of the caregiver. QOL was defined by Grant, Padilla, Ferrell, and Rhiner (1990) as “a personal statement of the positivity or negativity of attributes that characterize one’s life” (p. 261). The QOL of the FCG and the QOL of the patient with lung cancer affect each other throughout the illness trajectory (Northouse, 2005; Ryan, Howell, Jones, & Hardy, 2008; Siminoff, Wilson-Genderson, & Baker, 2010) (see Figure 1). The demands of the FCG role, as well as bearing witness to the patient’s suffering, impact a FCG’s QOL and ability to function.

The purpose of the article is to (a) describe the current science regarding QOL of FCGs of patients with lung cancer, (b) use two FCG case studies to describe QOL issues that