

Influence of Patient Functional Status and Depression on Strain in Caregivers

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BACKGROUND: Individuals who provide care to older adult women with breast cancer can experience distressing caregiver strain.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this study was to determine whether functional status and depression in older adult women with breast cancer relates to strain in their caregivers. Relationships among caregiver characteristics and strain were also evaluated.

METHODS: This multivariate, cross-sectional study used activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living, Timed Up and Go Test, Geriatric Depression Scale, and Modified Caregiver Strain Index (MCSI). Statistical analyses included Wilcoxon rank-sum tests and Spearman rank correlations. Logistic regression was used to predict MCSI scores.

FINDINGS: Patient Timed Up and Go Test and Geriatric Depression Scale scores had the greatest impact on MCSI, with lower function and greater depression associated with increased caregiver strain. Advanced disease was associated with increased caregiver strain. When cancer stage is controlled for, caregiver employment is associated with increased strain.

KEYWORDS

caregiver strain; geriatric oncology; breast cancer; depression; functional status

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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APPROXIMATELY 300,000 WOMEN WERE DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER in 2021, which accounts for nearly 15% of all new cancer diagnoses (National Cancer Institute [NCI], 2021a). The average age of a person diagnosed with breast cancer is 63 years (NCI, 2021a). Cancer treatment creates a wide range of needs, including attending appointments, administering medication, and other physical supportive care needs that can affect the quality of life of caregivers (Mohammadzadeh Nimekari et al., 2019).

Background

Caregiver Strain and Burden

Caring for an older adult diagnosed with cancer can affect a caregiver emotionally and physically, particularly if the person requiring care has many needs (Oncology Nursing Society, 2018). Strain occurs when the burden of caregiving exceeds the resources and capacity of the caregiver (Oncology Nursing Society, 2018). Caregiver burden refers to the physical and emotional effects of strain that results from meeting the needs of a person diagnosed with cancer (de Moor et al., 2017). Caregivers often experience burden and strain, and this should be anticipated when considering the plan of care.

Factors such as caregiver health, amount of sleep, severity of patient illness, and availability of social support can affect caregiver strain and burden (Johansen et al., 2018). Approximately 42% of caregivers of patients with cancer report that depression and anxiety affect their perceived burden (Johansen et al., 2018). These factors can be compounded by financial problems and poor health in the patient and caregiver (Geng et al., 2018). Additional factors that affect caregiver strain are age of the caregiver, type of cancer diagnosis, and functional status of the patient (Ge & Mordiffi, 2017). Increased age has been associated with lower caregiver burden, and pairs of older adult patients and caregivers report less caregiver strain and burden (Goldzweig et al., 2019). Younger people tend to be employed and spend less time providing care yet must perform the same number of caregiving tasks as those who are unemployed (Longacre et al., 2021). Balancing the demands of caregiving while maintaining relationships, physical health, and well-being can be difficult (Cai et al., 2021).

Defining Caregiving

Caregiving is the act of helping another person with daily needs and can include assisting a person with activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, transporting to medical care, providing symptom management, and