

Letter to the Editor

Cite this article: Kaul P, Garg PK (2023).
Unsung heroes in the battle against cancer.
Palliative and Supportive Care **21**, 961–962.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478951523001116>

Received: 23 June 2023

Accepted: 25 June 2023

Corresponding author: Pankaj Kumar Garg;
Email: dr.pankajgarg@gmail.com

Caregivers play a pivotal role in providing physical, emotional, and psychological support to individuals undergoing the challenging process of cancer treatment. They are often the unsung heroes who tirelessly attend to the needs of the patients, offering comfort and encouragement during the arduous journey of diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. The presence of a supportive caregiver has been shown to alleviate stress, reduce anxiety, and improve the overall quality of life (QOL) for patients. It is essential to recognize that effective treatment outcomes heavily depend on patient adherence to prescribed therapies and medications (Heidenreich et al. 2023). Caregivers act as a crucial link between the healthcare team and the patient, ensuring that treatment plans are diligently followed (Kaul et al. 2023). Without the dedicated efforts of caregivers, the efficacy of treatments may be compromised, making their involvement a critical factor in the patient's prognosis.

However, caregiving for patients with cancer imposes a significant amount of stress on caregivers, encompassing physical, psychological, emotional, social, and financial burdens (Bradley et al. 2022; Chow et al. 2023b; Fong et al. 2022). The complex and challenging nature of oncological treatments further intensifies these difficulties. It is crucial to recognize that caregivers themselves require support and assistance. Caregiver strain (Chow et al. 2023a) refers to the responses that arise from the stress and demands associated with caregiving. These responses encompass a range of emotional reactions, such as feelings of being torn between responsibilities or experiencing contentment. Furthermore, caregiver strain can also manifest in physical reactions such as fatigue and hypervigilance. Various sustainable interventions (Chow et al. 2023b; Kudrick et al. 2023) have been suggested to address their needs, including face-to-face and telehealth-based training programs, education on the impact of caregiving, coping strategies, self-care approaches, and assistance with organizational planning facilitated by social workers. By implementing these interventions, caregivers will receive the necessary assistance and resources to address their challenges and improve their well-being. This, in turn, will empower caregivers to provide better care and support to the patients they serve. As caregivers experience improved QOL and mental health, they will be better equipped to meet the physical, emotional, and practical needs of patients with advanced cancer. The result is a more positive and supportive caregiving environment, which can positively impact patient outcomes and overall satisfaction with care (Chow et al. 2023b).

Nevertheless, we firmly believe that the initial step lies in acknowledging the invaluable contribution of caregivers toward the successful treatment of their patients. This recognition not only uplifts their morale but also validates their importance and instills a sense of contentment (Qian et al. 2023). In our practice, we place a strong emphasis on the acknowledgment and appreciation of caregivers for their exceptional support provided to patients throughout the entire cancer journey. From the early stages of diagnosis to the treatment phase and even during the survivorship period, we make a conscious effort to recognize the profound commitment of caregivers in providing comprehensive assistance encompassing physical, psychological, emotional, and logistical domains. Every interaction with patients and caregivers is an opportunity to honor and validate their unwavering dedication.

In conclusion, recognizing the pivotal role of caregivers and incorporating their needs into the broader cancer care framework will result in more holistic and effective treatment approaches.

Data availability statement. No new data were generated or analyzed in this manuscript.

Author contributions. Conceptualization: PKG. Methodology: PK, PKG. Data curation: PK, PKG. Formal analysis: PK, PKG. Validation: PKG. Supervision: PKG. Writing original draft: PK, PKG. Writing – review and editing: PK, PKG.

Funding. The authors declare that no funding was received for this manuscript

Competing interest. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

- Bradley CJ, Schulick RD and Yabroff KR** (2022) Unpaid caregiving: What are the hidden costs? *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute* **114**(11), 1431–1433. doi:10.1093/jnci/djac156
- Chow AYM, Fordjour GA, Jiao K, et al.** (2023a) Redefining caregiver strain for family caregivers in end-of-life care in Hong Kong. *Palliative & Supportive Care*, 1–8. doi:10.1017/s1478951523000020
- Chow R, Mathews JJ, Cheng EY, et al.** (2023b) Interventions to improve outcomes for caregivers of patients with advanced cancer: A meta-analysis. *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. doi:10.1093/jnci/djad075
- Fong ZV, Teinor J, Yeo TP, et al.** (2022) Assessment of caregivers' burden when caring for patients with pancreatic and periampullary cancer. *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute* **114**(11), 1468–1475. doi:10.1093/jnci/djac153
- Heidenreich A, Elsner S, Wörler F, et al.** (2023) Physicians' perspectives on family caregivers' roles in elderly cancer patients' therapies: A qualitative, interview-based study. *Supportive Care in Cancer* **31**(7). doi:10.1007/s00520-023-07857-6
- Kaul P, Brandl A and Garg PK** (2023) Multidisciplinary cancer treatment: Beyond the confines of the board room. *European Journal of Surgical Oncology*. doi:10.1016/j.ejso.2023.05.003
- Kudrick LD, Baddour K, Wu R, et al.** (2023) Longitudinal analysis of caregiver burden in head and neck cancer. *JAMA Otolaryngology–Head & Neck Surgery*. doi:10.1001/jamaoto.2023.1283
- Qian Y, Asad S, Park EM, et al.** (2023) Rural resilience during COVID-19: The lived experience of North Carolinian rural-dwelling cancer caregivers. *Supportive Care in Cancer* **31**(7). doi:10.1007/s00520-023-07840-1