

REVIEW ARTICLE

Informal educational interventions for caregivers of adult cancer survivors

A.A. Ifanti¹, A.A. Argyriou², H. Kalofonos²

¹Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, University of Patras; ²Department of Medicine-Division of Oncology, University Hospital of Patras, Rion-Patras, Greece

Summary

This review study explores the available data relating to the informal education aspects of effective interventions applied in caregivers of adult cancer survivors to maintain their own health and quality of life (QoL) and as such to provide the optimal care to the cancer patient. The implications of these interventions in oncology practice are also discussed.

Available data show that, over the last years, a significant proportion of caregivers of cancer survivors are increasingly offered informal education interventions towards the reduction of their burden. More specifically, educational, skills training, and therapeutic counseling interventions seem

to positively affect caregivers' well-being and overall QoL.

However, based on available data, one cannot generalize these interventions on improving caregivers' outcomes of daily living activities and QoL. As such, available intervention strategies should be further tested and validated in larger samples, whereas novel health promotion educational approaches are expected to be designed to effectively address and comply with the appropriate needs of caregivers of cancer patients.

Key words: cancer survivors, caregivers, health promotion interventions, informal education, quality of life

Introduction

It is generally considered that a diagnosis of cancer results in immediate and long-term changes in several domains of life of both the patients and their families. As such, individuals with cancer and their family members are very likely to experience similar existential apprehensions and concerns as one emotional system [1]. This reciprocal effect is increasingly evident, because nowadays the role of caregivers has changed from relatively passive to active participation in decision-making. Moreover, treatment advances have led to a significant prolongation of survival of cancer patients and therefore caregivers are becoming all the more responsible for providing physical and emotional care to them over long periods of time [2].

Caregiver burden is a multidimensional response to various stressors associated with the caregiving experience. Available data advocate in favor of the view that caring for patients with cancer can be demanding and severely burdensome for their caregivers, who, not

uncommonly, they experience a similar degree of emotional distress and psychosocial problems like patients [3]. Several other factors, such as difficulties in communication between patients and caregivers and lack of appropriate information and education relating to the best possible way to cope with the disease-related challenges, may further decrease the ability of patients and caregivers to support one another, thus exerting a negative effect on the marital or family relationships [4,5].

The application of health promotion and informal education approaches onto oncology patients has recently attracted significant attention as literature contains studies prospectively evaluating lifestyle changes and other interventions to reduce cancer-related health risks in cancer survivors [6]. However, little is known relating to the most effective educational interventions for caregivers of cancer patients to ameliorate the well-being, the mental and physical health and their overall QoL.

To our knowledge, literature contains only few systematic reviews either solely describing the type, method and content of interventions applied in family