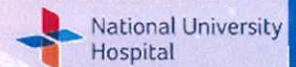




“I’m ready to go through the journey with her”: caregivers’ experiences and needs for colorectal cancer surgery



WAN, SW¹., CHONG, CS²., JEE, XP²., PIKKARAINEN, M³., & HE, H-G¹

¹ Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, Singapore

² Division of Colorectal Surgery, National University Hospital, National University Health System, Singapore

³ University of Oulu, Finland

INTRODUCTION

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is a chronic, debilitating disease characterized by abdominal pain, altered bowel habits, rectal bleeding or blood in stools, loss of appetite, persistent lethargy, unexplained weight loss, and is the top three most common cancers in both men and women globally.

As incidences continue to rise, more are expected to undergo curative surgeries which are the primary, mainstream treatment for this disease. Yet, despite increased survival rates following advancements in medical technology, the perioperative phase remains stressful and traumatic for some.

Family caregivers play a critical role in supporting their patients’ acceptance and adjustment toward illness, but they are not spared from the devastating effects of their care recipients’ diagnosis and treatment. Limited studies to-date have focused on understanding the experiences, coping styles and needs of family caregivers providing care during the perioperative phase, thereby providing justification for the current study.

STUDY AIM

To explore the experiences and needs of family caregivers who provide care to patients who undergo colorectal cancer surgery.

METHODS



Study design: An exploratory descriptive qualitative design



Setting: Outpatient specialist medical centre of a large, acute tertiary hospital in Singapore



Sampling: Purposive and maximum variation sampling until data saturation point



Eligibility: Family caregivers of outpatients diagnosed with primary colorectal cancer and had undergone surgery



Recruitment period: December 2019 to November 2020 (DSRB ref no.: 2019/00846)



Data collection: Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews, pilot-tested with a guide developed based on Lazarus & Folkman’s stress-coping theory,



Data analysis: Thematic analysis with rigor ensured

RESULTS

A total of 12 family caregivers were recruited and interviewed, with data saturation being achieved at the 9th participant. The interviews lasted between 36 to 84 minutes (mean = 57 minutes). Below is a brief summary of the characteristics of our participants:

- Mean age: 52.2 years old
- Females (n = 8)
- Various religions
- University educated (n = 6)
- Half employed and half not working
- Monthly household income per capita \$2,000 - \$5,000 (n = 8)
- Children of care recipients (n = 8)
- No prior caregiving experience (n = 9)
- Mean current caregiving duration: 22.5 months

Six main themes were derived from our data:

1. Initial reactions to care recipients’ diagnosis

2. Adoption of the caregiving role

3. Challenges encountered during care provision

4. Positive reframing and taking proactive steps

5. Types of support from a variety of resources

6. Fulfilling purposes and gained rewards

Firstly, ‘initial reactions to care recipients’ diagnosis’ describes the myriad of emotions arising from the lack of knowledge about colorectal cancer and its treatment, as well as the situational appropriateness when news of the diagnosis arrived.

Secondly, ‘adoption of the caregiving role’ sheds light on participants’ perception of the caregiving role and how it led to the eventual assumption of this responsibility.

Thirdly, ‘challenges encountered during care provision’ reveals the multifaceted demands and difficulties encountered during care provision.

The fourth and fifth theme, ‘positive reframing and taking proactive steps’ and ‘types of support from a variety of resources’ delineate the collective coping strategies and support resources utilized to sustain oneself in the caregiving journey.

Lastly, ‘fulfilling purposes and gained rewards’ presents insights and satisfaction gleaned from the overall experience.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights an imperative need for more targeted psychological assessments and interventions to enhance their well-being and sustain caregiving efforts.

This study is funded by the Singapore Cancer Society 2018 grant.

•Ballinger, A. B., & Anggiansah, C. (2007). Colorectal cancer. *BMJ (Clinical research ed.)*, 335(7622), 715-718. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39321.527384.BE>

•Hildebrandt C, Mayer H, Koller A. Experiences of patients with colorectal cancer from diagnosis until completion of treatment: A meta-ethnography approach. *Psycho-Oncology*. 2019;28(2):219-27.