

# A Comparison of the Reactions of Caregivers of Patients With Cancer Versus Patients With Other Chronic Medical Conditions

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To explore positive and negative aspects of the experiences of informal caregivers of patients with cancer and patients with other chronic medical conditions, to compare the reactions of caregivers of patients with cancer and patients with other chronic medical conditions, and to study the association of caregiver reactions with demographic factors.

**Design:** Descriptive, correlational.

**Setting:** A comprehensive cancer center and a community hospital, both in Philadelphia, PA.

**Sample:** 111 informal caregivers.

**Methods:** A survey that could be completed either in paper format or electronically was administered.

**Main Research Variables:** Self-esteem, impact on schedule, impact on finances, impact on health, lack of family support, positive aspects of caregiving.

**Findings:** For caregivers, offering emotional and psychological support was most challenging, whereas providing transportation was least challenging. Caregivers reported high self-esteem and moderately positive aspects of caregiving. Caregivers of patients with cancer identified more positive aspects of caregiving. Differences in the caregiving experience based on demographic factors (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) were found.

**Conclusions:** Caregivers reported positive and negative aspects of caregiving. Reactions of informal caregivers to the caregiving experience vary more based on individual demographic factors than on the diagnosis of the patient. Differences exist in the caregiving experience based on race and ethnicity.

**Implications for Nursing:** Nurses need to be aware that positive and negative reactions to the caregiving experience exist. Assessment and care planning should include consideration for individual factors, such as gender, race, and ethnicity.

The care of patients with chronic medical conditions, including cancer, often involves the assistance of informal caregivers, such as family members or friends. An estimated 40 million caregivers provide care to adults (individuals aged 18 years or older) with a disability or illness. Caregiver services were valued at \$470 billion per year in 2013—an increase from \$375 billion in 2007; with the aging population expected to double between 2000 and 2030, the impact of caregiving on health care will likely continue to grow (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2016).

Although the majority of caregivers are women, research suggests that the number of male caregivers is increasing and will continue to do so because of a variety of social demographic factors (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2016). Scarce research exists on how the experiences of caregivers may vary according to gender. Early studies of caregiving have identified that women tend to perceive