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

Susan Copley Cobb, PhD, RN-BC, Lisa Etkins, MSS, LCSW, OSW-C, Maryellen Nelson, DNP, CRNP, BC, Brian Egleston, MPP, PhD, and Carole W. Sweeney, RN, MSN, AOCN®

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.

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.