Exploring Spirituality in Family Caregivers of Patients With Primary Malignant Brain Tumors Across the Disease Trajectory

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More than 66 million adults in the United States are in need of family care, and 29% of the population consider themselves to be informal caregivers to the chronically ill, disabled, or elderly (National Family Caregivers Association, 2011). In addition, about one in five family caregivers provides more than 40 hours of care per week for a loved one (National Family Caregivers Association, 2011). A number of negative outcomes could result from providing care, including increased depressive symptoms, burden, anxiety, changed sleep patterns, altered immune responses, and poor overall health (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2003; Lazarus, 1974; Pinquert & Sörensen, 2004; Schulz & Beach, 1999; Sherwood et al., 2008; Vitaliano et al., 2002; Vitaliano, Zhang, & Scanlan, 2003).

Outside of the caregiving literature, a strong perception of spirituality has been associated with lower rates of depressive symptoms, less distress, and better quality of life in individuals recently diagnosed with a life-threatening disease (Chang, Noonan & Tennstedt, 1998). Positive associations have been identified between religion or spirituality and mental health (Chang et al., 1998; Levin, 2010; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989), particularly for patients with terminal illnesses such as AIDS and advanced cancer (Kendall, 1994; Vallurupalli et al., 2012). However, less is known about how spirituality affects family caregivers, particularly as the needs and prognosis of the care recipient and the responsibilities of the caregiver change along the course of the disease trajectory.

Because of the established association between the caregiver role and experiencing negative outcomes (Rhee et al., 2008), potential sources of support for caregivers must be explored. If associations between spirituality and positive outcomes extend to family caregivers, clinicians could use this information to screen caregivers at risk for distress and implement interventions that build on or strengthen existing spirituality. The purpose of the current analysis was to determine whether family caregivers...