

The Emotions and Coping Strategies of Caregivers of Family Members with a Terminal Cancer.

Carol Grbich, Deborah Parker, Ian Maddocks. Journal of Palliative Care 17: 1/2001;30-36

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Received during: Bus Rounds January 22 2002

Abstract:

This study documents the emotional experiences and coping strategies of a group of caregivers as they move from the diagnosis of a close family member with terminal illness through the stages of caring and post bereavement. Supportive evidence, matching that of previous literature, was gathered regarding the impact of such care, but additional findings counter the notion of "burden" by revealing that strong positive emotions were experienced by these caregivers regarding the opportunity given to them to express their love through care. By contrast and post bereavement, however, intense grief was reported. There appeared to be a complete lack of emotional support throughout from health professionals, particularly in the bereavement phase when need is very apparent.

Comments:

Strengths:

- 1) Longitudinal design.
- 2) A stage by stage interactive approach over an 18 month period allowing one set of data to inform the next.
- 3) The involvement of four different groups
 - Bereaved caregiver focus group and individual interviews. 12 participants attending a 16-week support group.
 - 86 bereaved caregivers questionnaires
 - Four Focus Groups with a total of 40 health service providers from a variety of disciplines
 - Case Studies of individual caregivers selected to reflect an identified age-based distribution of patients with cancer. (9 wives, 6 husbands, 3 sons, 2 daughters)
 - Use of open-ended questions in interviews conducted at 3-6 monthly intervals. Patient was present at some interviews.
 - Additional interviews with 14 caregivers following the bereavement.
- 4) Identification of positive emotions

Weaknesses: The samples tend to be pre-selected. Not a lot of new information from this study. Suggestions regarding how care providers might use this information to increase support to the caregivers would be helpful.

Relevance to Palliative Care: Provides information/material for a caregiver support group and preparing caregivers for what they may feel after the death occurs.

Good to encourage caregivers to enjoy what time they have and see it positively, as a gift, rather than as a burden. The opportunity to communicate their love to the patient by showing affection through providing care. To also feel pride in what they are doing.

This paper also supports the need for post bereavement services