

JOURNAL WATCH

Associations between Caregiver-Perceived Delirium in Patients with Cancer and Generalized Anxiety in their Caregivers

Buss MK, Vanderwerker LC, Inouye SK, Zhang B, Block SD, Prigerson HG.
J Palliat Med. 2007 Oct;10(5):1083-92

Presenter: Laura DiMarzo

Presented: January 8, 2008 at Journal Rounds, Tertiary Palliative Care Unit, Grey Nuns Hospital, Edmonton AB

BACKGROUND: Delirium is a common complication seen in advanced cancer and its impact on caregivers can be profound. The authors of this article used cross-sectional data to determine whether there is a relationship between caregiver-perceived delirium in patients with advanced cancer and rates of caregiver psychiatric disorders.

METHODS: Frequency of caregiver-perceived delirium was determined by using the *Stressful Caregiving Response to Experiences of Dying (SCARED)* questionnaire. The patients included were reported to be “confused, delirious” at least once per week in the previous month. The *Structured Clinical Interview for the DSM-IV (SCID)* was used to diagnose psychiatric disorders among caregivers. In addition, the *Caregiver Burden Scale (CBS)* was used to measure the stress of care giving.

RESULTS: A total of 200 caregivers were included in the study. Caregivers who reported caregiver-perceived delirium were 12 times more likely to have general anxiety symptomatology (odds ratio [OR]=12.12;p<0.01). There were no similar associations found with Major Depressive Disorder, PTSD or panic disorder. The relationship between caregiver-perceived delirium and caregiver generalized anxiety persisted after adjusting for caregiver burden and exposure to other stressful patient experiences (OR=9.99;p=0.04).

CONCLUSIONS: The findings of an association between caregiver-perceived delirium in patients and generalized anxiety in caregivers supports the hypothesis that the development of delirium in a patient is a very stressful event for caregivers.

STRENGTHS:

- First published report of an association between caregiver-perceived delirium in advanced cancer patients and a caregiver mental health outcome
- Excluded patients with dementia from the study
- Applicable to our patient population (patients with advanced cancer)
- Multiple sites were used for recruitment
- Used validated assessment tools

WEAKNESSES

- Cannot actually diagnose Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) since symptoms were only reported for one month previous (need 6 months for GAD)
- Caregivers with GAD might over-report delirium symptoms
- It was a subjective study that relied upon retrospective recall.
- Delirium was not clinically diagnosed by a health professional
- Delirium is likely only one of many factors contributing to caregiver anxiety.

RELEVANCE TO PALLIATIVE CARE:

We know that delirium can be a frightening event for caregivers to witness. This study is the first of its kind to document an association between caregiver-perceived delirium in advanced cancer patients and generalized anxiety in caregivers. This research gives further evidence to the importance of recognizing delirium and treating it when possible. It also highlights the importance of supporting and educating caregivers during these episodes.