



Service Priorities and Programmes
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Is caregiver strain correlated with grief among advanced cancer patients? A pilot retrospective review using a medical social work database.

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Introduction

Caregiving can be a stressful task for family members of advanced cancer patients. However, the impact of caregiver strain on the bereavement is controversial.

Objectives

To study the correlation between Modified Caregiver Strain Index (MCSI) and Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG) in Chinese caregiver of advanced cancer patient receiving palliative care.

Methodology

This is a retrospective study from a cohort of patients who had ever received palliative care in- or out-patient service in Caritas Medical Centre (CMC) and died between 1 January 2015 and 30 June 2015. A 13-item Chinese version of Modified Caregiver Strain Index would be completed by the family caregivers in the initial psychosocial assessment. (Chan et al. 2013) A 19-item Chinese version of Inventory of Complicated Grief would be sent to the same bereaved caregivers 6 months after patients' death. (Prigerson et al. 1995) Both tools have been validated in local setting and reflected informal caregivers' strain as well as their risks of complicated grief. Spearman correlation was used to determine the correlation between caregivers' MCSI and ICG scores.

Result

Among 249 caregivers who were enrolled, 43 caregivers completed both MCSI in the service uptake as well as returned ICG after patient's death. The correlation between MCSI and ICG were not significant. (Spearman's $\rho=0.195$, $p=0.210$, $N=43$) Subgroup analysis was performed by dividing the caregivers into high-stress group (MCSI scored 14 or above out of 26, $N=7$ and low-stress group (MCSI scored 13 or below, $N=36$). The correlation between MCSI and ICG was again non-significant in low-stress group ($\rho=0.170$, $p=0.322$). However, among the high-stress group, the correlation was statistically significant ($\rho=0.759$, $p=0.048$). To our knowledge, this is

the first analysis to explore the correlation between MCSI and ICG in real-world local cancer palliative care settings. Our study suggested that among those caregivers who are at high caregiver strain, the higher the strain the caregivers had, the more severe symptoms of complicated grief the caregivers may suffer in the future. A larger cohort is needed to test the hypothesis and identify potential cut-off point for MCSI which predicts complicated grief.