

SUPPORTING CANCER CAREGIVERS: INSIGHTS FROM IRANIAN CANCER CAREGIVERS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ONCOLOGY PROFESSIONALS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Supporting a family member with cancer poses significant challenges for family caregivers. In Iran, caregivers often turn to Psychosocial Oncology Professionals for assistance in navigating and adapting to the challenges inherent in the cancer journey.

However, psychosocial professionals themselves are faced with heavy workloads, prioritizing patient care.

This study examined the views of cancer caregivers and psychosocial oncology professionals on the challenges, needs and solutions to better support cancer caregivers in Iran.

METHOD

Employing a qualitative study design, we conducted interviews and a focus group with 11 psychosocial oncology professionals and interviews with 15 family cancer caregivers in Iran.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was performed using qualitative thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Psychosocial oncology professionals identified challenges of working with cancer caregivers, including patient overload, inadequate time allocation for caregiver issues, lack of protocols and guidelines for working with caregivers, and a high rate of missed appointments causing workflow disruptions and inconsistent care. Proposed solutions included implementing caregiver assessment procedures, caregiver clinical practice guidelines, psychosocial oncology training, multi-professional teamwork, and blended multi-modal digital health care delivery in working with caregivers.

Caregivers, facing disorientation post-diagnosis, expressed a need for support and navigation from a professional and a peer.

They prefer to seek informational, psychological and peer support through blended multi-modal digital health care to ease the caregiving process.

DISCUSSION

While existing literature underscores the social support needed by cancer caregivers and suggests utilizing digital interventions to aid healthcare providers, our study revealed similar needs for caregivers. Psychosocial oncology professionals and cancer caregivers advocate for blended multi-modal digital healthcare to address challenges in delivering and receiving psychological health care, supporting caregivers and easing professionals' workload.

Since professionals are eager to know how to blend their services, future research efforts should address the implementation of blended supportive care for cancer caregivers.

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