

Self-Care and Risk Behaviors in Primary Caregiver of Cancer Patients

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Abstract : Introduction: Primary caregivers of cancer patients have health problems related to their lack of time, stress, and fiscal strain. Their health problems could affect their patients' health and also increase the expenses in public health. Aim: To describe self-care and risk behaviors in a sample of Mexican primary caregiver and the relation of these behaviors with emotional distress (caregiver burden, anxiety and depression symptoms), coping and sociodemographic variables. Method: Participated in this study 173 caregivers of a third level reference medical facility (age: M=49.4, SD=13.5) females 78%, males 22%, 57.5% were caregivers of patients with terminal cancer (CPTC), and 40.5% were caregivers of patients on oncology treatment (CPOT). Results: The 75.7% of caregivers reported to have had health problem in last six months as well as several symptoms which were related to emotional distress, these symptoms were more frequently between CPTC and female caregivers. A half (47.3%) of sample reported have had difficulties in caring their health; these difficulties were related to emotional distress and lower coping, more affected caregivers were who attend male patients and CPTC. The 76.8% of caregivers had health problems in last six months, but 26.5% of them waited to search medical care until they were very sick, and 11% didn't do it. Also, more than a half of sample (56.1%) admitted to have risk behaviors as drink alcohol, smoke or overeating for feeling well, these caregivers showed high emotional distress and lower coping. About caregivers healthy behaviors, 80% of them had a hobby; 27.2% do exercise usually and between 12% to 60% did medical checkups (glucose tests, blood pressure and cholesterol tests, eye exams and watched their weight), these caregivers had lower emotional distress and high coping, some variables related health behaviors were: care only one patient or a female patient and be a CPOT, social support, high educational level and experience as a caregiver in past. The half of caregivers were worrying to develop cancer in the future; this idea was 2.5 times more frequent in caregiver with problems to care their health. Conclusions: The results showed a big proportion of caregivers with medical problems. High emotional distress and low coping were related to physical symptoms, risk behaviors, and low self-care; poor self-care was frequently even in caregiver who have chronic illness.

Keywords : cancer, primary caregiver, risk behaviors, self-care

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