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Letter to the Editor

## Mental health challenges among informal caregivers of cancer patients: Analyzing depression and anxiety in hospitals

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Dear Editor,

We are writing to highlight the significant contributions of the recent study by Sharma et al. (2024), which explores and analyzes the levels of depression and anxiety experienced by informal caregivers of cancer patients in selected tertiary hospitals in Nepal.<sup>1</sup> This study provides valuable insights into the often-overlooked mental health needs of informal caregivers in the context of cancer care, contributing significantly to the fields of health and psychology, particularly regarding support for informal caregivers of cancer patients.<sup>2</sup>

The study revealed that a majority of the informal caregivers experienced significant levels of depression and anxiety. Factors such as extended caregiving duration, lack of social support, and financial burdens were found to be closely associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety. Furthermore, the study found that female caregivers and older individuals were at a higher risk of experiencing depression and anxiety compared to male or younger caregivers.<sup>3</sup> Understanding the mental health needs of caregivers is crucial, providing valuable insights for developing better support systems and emphasizing the importance of caregiver well-being in the broader context of cancer treatment.<sup>4</sup>

The levels of depression and anxiety among informal caregivers were notably high, primarily due to the emotional burden they face while caring for patients battling serious illnesses. Many caregivers also encounter financial stress due to the high costs of cancer treatment. In addition, the lack of

emotional and social support from their environment exacerbates their psychological condition.<sup>5</sup>

Several key aspects must be strengthened to improve the mental health of informal caregivers of cancer patients in hospitals. A better understanding of the psychological impact on informal caregivers is essential, as they are often overlooked despite playing a critical role in patient care.<sup>6</sup> There is a need for developing targeted mental health interventions through better-designed intervention programs and focused mental health support for caregivers. Identifying high-risk caregivers, such as those susceptible to depression and anxiety, can allow for the development of more effective prevention and intervention programs. Hospital support systems should emphasize the importance of providing assistance to caregivers of cancer patients. This can encourage the development of policies and programs that help informal caregivers cope with the psychological and emotional stress during patient care. Public awareness and policy efforts should encourage policymakers to include support for informal caregivers in the healthcare system, particularly in the context of cancer care, which demands substantial time and energy from caregivers.<sup>7</sup>

The study carries significant implications for clinical practice and health policy in hospitals. There is a pressing need for mental health intervention programs specifically designed for caregivers of cancer patients. Support services such as counseling or peer support groups could be highly beneficial in alleviating the emotional pressure experienced by caregivers. Additionally, raising awareness about the importance of mental health care for caregivers in formal healthcare systems is crucial, including training healthcare professionals to recognize signs of mental health disorders in caregivers.

In conclusion, the exploration and analysis of depression and anxiety levels among informal caregivers of cancer patients in tertiary hospitals show that most informal caregivers experience significant levels of depression and anxiety, particularly related to long caregiving durations, lack of social support, and financial burdens. The findings indicate that female and older caregivers are at a higher risk of

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depression and anxiety compared to male or younger caregivers. This underscores the urgent need to understand the often-neglected mental health of informal caregivers. Targeted mental health support, including specialized intervention programs, counseling, and peer support groups, is essential to help alleviate the psychological burden they face. Consequently, this study provides valuable insights for developing more inclusive policies to support the well-being of informal caregivers of cancer patients and emphasizes the need for better hospital support systems. Additionally, public awareness and policies must be strengthened to ensure that informal caregivers receive greater attention within the complex and challenging context of cancer care.

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