




Letter to the Editor

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Economic burden on families: Analyzing the financial impact of palliative care for cancer patients

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Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter to express my views and analyze the recently published article in your journal “Caregivers’ concerns through health professionals’ eyes,” by Oliveira et al. (2024), which focuses on the challenges faced by informal caregivers of cancer patients receiving palliative care (PC). The research was conducted in Portugal and identified 3 main themes: caregiver burden, intra-family impact of the illness, and network vulnerability. The study emphasized the psychological, physical, and social challenges caregivers face (Oliveira et al. 2024). However, some critical aspects are not covered in depth in the article. Amid the fight against cancer, other challenges often arise, including the economic burden borne by families (Johnson et al. 2021). PC, as an approach that emphasizes improving cancer patients’ and their families’ quality of life, often carries significant financial consequences (Gaertner et al. 2017). When a family member is diagnosed with cancer, not only the health aspect is a concern but also the financial burden that may arise (Carrera et al. 2018). The cost of PC, which includes pain management, psychological support, and care at home or specialized facilities, can drain family savings (Knaul et al. 2018). Families often face unexpected and expensive expenses not fully covered by health insurance. Direct costs such as medicines, medical equipment, and healthcare services become an additional burden in addition to loss of income due to reduced working hours or having to stop working to care for the patient (Kaye et al. 2021).

In addition to direct costs, indirect costs must also be taken into account. The psychological burden experienced by families often leads to mental health problems that require additional treatment (Fegert et al. 2020). Ongoing financial stress can impact the family’s well-being long-term, including children who may need extra emotional and psychological support (Cameron et al. 2020). Uncertainty about the economic future often pressures families already struggling with the emotional challenges of caring for a loved one.

Several solutions can be considered to reduce this burden. Financial education and planning are critical first steps, such as monthly budgeting, long-term investments (stocks, bonds, or mutual funds), and emergency funds (Kim et al. 2019). Families must be informed about various options for financing care, including health insurance, government assistance, and assistance programs from nonprofit organizations (Odeyemi 2014). Wise management of financial resources is essential to minimize the long-term economic impact.

On the other hand, community support also plays a crucial role. Support groups, both online and face-to-face, such as online communities for people with chronic diseases, can provide valuable information and emotional support (Kingod et al. 2017). Governments and social organizations need to be more proactive in providing information and assistance to families struggling with the economic burden of PC (Williams et al. 2011). Initiatives such as community fundraising, legal aid, and psychological counseling can go a long way in easing the burden on families (McDaid et al. 2008).

In conclusion, the financial impact of PC for cancer patients on families cannot be ignored (Gardiner et al. 2014). Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive approach involving effective financial planning, community support, and responsive public policies. Thus, families can focus more on providing compassionate support to their family members battling cancer (Surbone et al. 2010).

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