

Oral Abstract 21: Cancer at work: A qualitative exploration of the psychosocial impact of employment disruption among patients with recurrent ovarian cancer

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Topic

Financial Toxicity and Disparities

Objectives

20.8% of patients (pts) with ovarian cancer (OVCA) experience employment disruption (job loss, reduction to part-time, long-term disability, or retirement) during the 1st year after diagnosis. We examined employment disruption among recurrent OVCA pts and identified lessons to inform support strategies.

Methods

Qualitative interviews were conducted with recurrent OVCA pts, who were recruited by purposive sampling. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and consensus-coded. Framework analyses guided content analysis.

Results

40 pts completed interviews from 1/2017 to 11/2018. Median age= 59.3 yrs; median time from diagnosis= 44.7 mos. 29 pts were coupled, 35 had \geq college education, and 25 had private health insurance. 11 pts were employed full time, 3 worked part time, 9 were retired, 8 were on disability, 6 were homemakers, and 3 were unemployed. 18 had annual household income of $>$ \$75,000. Figure 1 illustrates themes that emerged. Employment disruption was associated with loss of provision (e.g. income, health insurance), pride (e.g. independence), purpose (e.g. identity), and productivity (e.g. contribution to society). These losses fostered grief, guilt, resentment, and isolation. A pt stated: "... my husband lost his job because he was missing too many days ... that was about 10 years ago ... I have bills that are due from collection agencies from that first time ... so he doesn't even have a job now ... I have a really good job with really good benefits. But I'm the one that has the insurance, so I'm really nervous all the time that if I get too sick to work that I can't - that I'll have to stop my treatment." Another shared: "I also was able to work two jobs, and have a lot more independence ... And when I got diagnosed with cancer, that decreased almost like 0-to-360. I was home for a year ... it got to be extremely depressing ... I felt like I was not a participant of society." Pts reported insights gained through navigating these challenges. "... really explore your options in terms of what your insurance covers and doesn't. I know there are people who aren't even aware that there are cancer resource units attached to their insurance, and not every insurance company will volunteer that information."

Conclusions

Analyzing the employment challenges faced by cancer pts is essential to developing a robust psychological safety net and reforming labor laws to better protect pts.

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