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Why Them: The Informal Caregiver's Transition to a Cancer Diagnosis

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Why them?: The Informal Caregiver's Transition to Cancer Diagnosis

BACKGROUND

Hematologic malignancies (HM; acute leukemia or lymphoma¹) are life-threatening cancers

- Associated with high mortality, numerous symptoms, and lengthy hospitalizations¹
- Required hospitalization for intensive chemotherapy treatment²
- Affects family & one member takes role of informal caregiver

Informal Caregivers (IC) assist with pragmatic needs & help manage treatment symptoms, while navigating healthcare system³⁻⁴

- Distress levels are similar or higher than HM patients⁹⁻¹⁰
- Distress may have a ripple effect on aspects of IC's life, impact relationships¹¹ and physical well-being¹²
- Experience low quality of life and psychological well-being⁵⁻⁸

There is scant research exploring the experiences of ICs of HM patients, although that information would be helpful in addressing their needs

SPECIFIC AIM

Describe the complex experiences of informal caregivers of patients with HM, particularly with regard to adaptation and caregiver role preparation in the midst of diagnosis and treatment

METHODS

- Recruited from NCI-designated Cancer Center in US mid-Atlantic region within 3 months of the HM diagnosis
- Longitudinal descriptive design was used
- Here we analyzed and report on the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews¹³
- Content analysis conducted to generate common themes ¹⁴

Rebecca Hoppe¹, Marcia A. Winter¹, & Tara A. Albrecht² ¹Virginia Commonwealth University ²Duke University

RESULTS

	Demogr	aphics of Informal Caregiver (IC)
Age range		29-76 years (M=54.29, SD=15.19)
Gender		67.9% Female
Race & Ethnicity		67.9% Caucasian 21.4% Black or African American
Relationship to patient		67.9% Spouse/Significant other 10.7% Parent
Patient's HM diagnosis		85.7% Acute Leukemia 10.7% Lymphoma
	PSY	CHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMEN
Theme		Exemplar
Accepting Help	"It's easy to h	elp other people, but to accept help it's
Protection	• •	ere with him because [I am] trying to me has pains and asking questions he nee
		ere in this waiting room a lot and cry, p m. [I] don't want to let him see how sca sitive."
Powerlessness	"You work your whole life to get to the point that you to do things. All that's on hold. The future plan, you need maintenance, get the cars paid off, house paid of you can do some travelling and not worry. So [cancer	
Discomforting Thoughts	"Without him, I don't know how I would possibly ma could happen."	
Illness Transition	giving up? It s	t it every day because there's nothing I deseems like you're giving up. You don't want to talk, you don't want to do anyt up."
Caregiver Role Preparation	the medical fi	pared. I've actually worked in this hosp eld for twenty years. I'm a caregiver at ald be for my husband this early."
Empowerment	"I've actually	learned that I could do a lot more than
Норе	•	we will get through this and be over w and to him retiring. We have big plans fo

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(N=28)

3.6% Asian 3.6% Other 14.3% Child 7.1% Other (sister in-law) 7.1% Other

s not always so easy."

make sure he's telling [medical eds to ask."

pretty hard, because I have to stay cared I am. I need him to stay

ou retire and we had all these plans work, get your house so it doesn't off, all these, you know, bills so er] just robs you of things."

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pital as a care partner. I've been in heart naturally. I just never

I thought I could."

with by the summer. I am really for doing different things."

RESULTS

Informal caregivers endorsed both adaptive and maladaptive psychological adjustment

- Adaptive adjustment included accepting help from others and feelings of empowerment, control, and hope
- Maladaptive adjustment included feelings of powerlessness, protectiveness, and rumination of discomforting thoughts

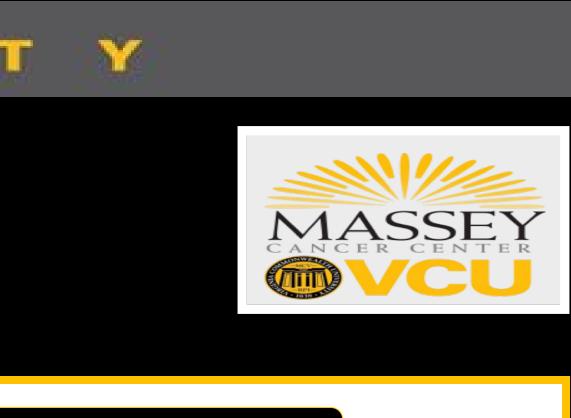
CONCLUSIONS

- Findings highlight the complexities of caregiver burden as they adapt to their HM's diagnosis and new caregiver role
- IC's would benefit from receiving structured guidance and support as they adjust and manage the challenges inherent of a new complex HM
- Apprising healthcare personnel of caregivers' experiences can inform interventions aimed at caregiver role preparation, burden prevention, acceptance, and empowerment in role
- Future research should explore the benefit of tailored supportive care interventions that enhance adaptive adjustment for IC

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported through the VCU Massey Cancer Center Tina L. Bachas Nursing Award Program and the Susan White Holsworth Palliative Care Scholar funds.

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to the patients and their families who graciously shared their experiences with us.







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CONTACT: hopper2@vcu.edu **Rebecca Hoppe**



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METHODS



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"I'm staying here with him has pains and asking question
"I come out here in this wai him. [I] don't want to let him
"You work your whole life things. All that's on hold. T maintenance, get the cars pa travelling and not worry. So
"Without him, I don't know
"I think about it every day be seems like you're giving up talk, you don't want to do a
"I'm very prepared. I've act field for twenty years. I'm a husband this early."
"I've actually learned that I
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PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

Exemplar

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DEMOGRAPHICS

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CONCLU

- Findings highlight the complexities of caregiver burden and adjustment • ICs would benefit from receiving structured guidance and support • Palliative care can be leveraged to support ICs

- Apprising oncology clinicians of caregivers' experiences can inform interventions aimed at caregiver role preparation, burden prevention, promoting acceptance, and empowerment in their new supportive role
- Testing efficacy of tailored supportive care interventions for both the patient with HM and their IC are needed to support adaptive adjustment



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