

RESEARCH BRIEF

Patient activation and treatment decision-making in the context of cancer: examining the contribution of informal caregivers' involvement

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Why is this research important?

- The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the caregiving relationship on the association between patient activation and treatment decision-making and adherence to treatment regimen
- Patient activation (PA)—which refers to the individual's knowledge, skill, and confidence for managing their own health is emerging as a key factor to promote healthy behaviors, treatment adherence, and better health outcomes in the context of chronic diseases
- The ability to offer high-quality cancer care relies on patient-centered communication and decision-making that meet the needs of patients and families

Who was part of this study and how was the research conducted?

- Survey data was collected from 504 cancer survivors from *CancerCare*, a US national nonprofit organization.
- Structural equation modeling (SEM) controlling for covariates was used to examine the relationship between patient activation measure (PAM), caregiver involvement, and the identified outcomes. Moderator analysis was conducted using multiple group SEM.

What did we find?

- Patient activation was positively associated with all three selected outcomes
- Findings indicate that highly activated survivors were more likely to report that the treatment plan was reflective of their values and goals. They were also more likely to report greater adherence to treatment and satisfaction with the amount of input given.
- In addition, caregiver involvement moderated the relationship between patient activation and adherence to treatment, suggesting that despite the level of patient activation, low caregiver involvement can represent an aspect of risk for treatment adherence.
- However, for cancer survivors reporting low rates of caregiver's involvement, patient activation was not associated with treatment adherence. Research is needed to test and deliver self-management interventions inclusive of informal caregivers.

Action steps for educators

- Findings supported the need not only to monitor and sustain patient activation across the cancer continuum, but also to assume a dyadic perspective when designing self-management interventions in cancer survivorship.
- Future research is needed to identify proximal and interpersonal aspects that influence caregivers' involvement in the cancer treatment decision-making process and strategies to optimize the communication exchange within the patient- caregiver dyad.

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ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Dr. Acquati's research program has extended current understanding of the psychosocial issues experienced by survivors and caregivers and has assessed how interpersonal processes contribute to mental health, coping, and wellbeing-related outcomes, particularly for those who experience cancer from a position of disadvantage. Through this work, she has developed interventions that leverage the role of close relationships for effective illness management and expanded providers' capacity for psychosocial care.

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