

# Korean American Patients' and Family Caregivers' Sources of Social Support and Perceptions of Cancer and the Caregiving Role: A Theory-Driven Qualitative Study

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**PURPOSE:** To understand the sources of social support and perceptions of cancer and the caregiving role for Korean American patients with cancer and their family caregivers.

**PARTICIPANTS & SETTING:** Using convenience sampling, Korean American patients with cancer and their family caregivers were recruited from Korean American churches and community health agencies.

**METHODOLOGIC APPROACH:** Semistructured interviews guided by the sociocultural stress and coping model were conducted with 12 dyads (N = 24) of Korean American patients with cancer and their family caregivers. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

**FINDINGS:** Patients' social support sources included Korean cancer support programs, family or friends, and religion. Family caregivers' sources of social support were limited to religion and friends.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING:** Nurses can encourage patients with cancer in racial and ethnic minority groups to attend cancer support programs offered in their primary language to enhance their quality of life during cancer survivorship. Culturally tailored interventions are needed to support the patients' family caregivers.

**KEYWORDS** cancer; caregiver; social support; quality of life; perceptions of illness

**ONF, 50(6), 693–703.**

**DOI** 10.1188/23.ONF.693-703

Cancer is the leading cause of death for the Asian American population, which is the fastest growing population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Among Asian American ethnic groups, Korean American people bear significant cancer burden because they have the highest incidence rates of stomach cancer, are the least likely to undergo cancer screenings, and often do not have health insurance (Chen et al., 2022; Hastings et al., 2015). In addition, with the increasing complexity of cancer management and the growing reliance on caregivers to provide necessary care, the burden of the disease extends to the family caregivers, thereby affecting the patients' and caregivers' quality of life (QOL) (Guerra-Martín et al., 2023; Kalter et al., 2018; Northouse et al., 2012). Several studies noted the importance of improving QOL in patients with cancer in racial and ethnic minority groups because they face cultural challenges (e.g., language barriers, trying to understand the healthcare system) in seeking professional help, building social support, and enlarging social networks (Wen et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2016).

Particularly for Korean American patients with cancer, few studies have defined sources of social support or provided insights into patients' and family caregivers' perceptions of cancer or of the caregiving experience. Two psychosocial factors—higher social support (Lim, 2014; Lim et al., 2008; Lim & Zebrack, 2008; Yoon et al., 2016, 2018) and lower negative perception of illness (Lim, 2014; Yoon et al., 2018)—lead to higher QOL among Korean American patients with cancer. However, these studies did not specify which sources of social support were used, and they did not