Quality of Life of Family Caregivers and Challenges Faced in Caring for Patients With Lung Cancer

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Family caregivers (FCGs) of patients with lung cancer face multiple challenges that affect their quality of life and well-being. Whether challenged physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually, distress in one area may compound challenges in other areas. To maintain function and health of FCGs as they provide valuable care for the health and well-being of the patient, attention must be given to the needs of FCGs for support and education. The purpose of this article is to describe the multifaceted challenges that FCGs of patients with lung cancer experience using case studies selected from a National Cancer Institute–funded program project. The cases are discussed in terms of how the FCG's quality of life is impacted by the caregiver role, as well as how stressors in one or more domains of quality of life compound difficulties in coping with the demands of the role. The importance of the oncology nurse’s assessment of FCGs’ needs for support, education, and self-care through the lung cancer illness trajectory is discussed while presenting accessible community resources to meet those needs.

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer and the number one cause of death in the United States, with more than 200,000 cases diagnosed each year accounting for 14% of all new cancer cases (American Cancer Society, 2011a; Siegel, Naishadham, & Jemal, 2012). Recommended treatment can be complex with surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy alone or in combination. Symptom burden of the disease or treatment is profound and impacts the patient as well as the family caregiver (FCG) who supports the patient.

FCGs face multiple challenges throughout the illness trajectory, evolving over time from the initial diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, throughout treatment, to living with the potential for disease progression and end-of-life care. Each FCG brings his or her own life experience, coping abilities, and support systems to the role, as well as physical, psychological, social, and spiritual strengths and weaknesses. How FCGs respond to the challenges of their roles impacts their ability to continue care for their family member through the illness trajectory. Antici-