

Title:

Caregivers Play Key Role in Disease Management of Older Colon Cancer Patients

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Summary:

Colon cancer patients who are 65 and older may benefit from a caregiver's involvement, and caregivers may ultimately have a major impact on patients' disease management, according to a survey of oncologists commissioned by the Alliance for Aging Research.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

Colon cancer patients who are 65 and older may benefit from a caregiver's involvement, and caregivers may ultimately have a major impact on patients' disease management, according to a survey of oncologists commissioned by the Alliance for Aging Research.

Ninety percent of oncologists feel that caregivers have a moderate to major impact on the decision-making process. Unfortunately, only about 64 percent of colon cancer patients in this age group have caregivers' support.

"Physicians should encourage patients to enlist a caregiver and involve them in the treatment decision-making process," said Dr. Stuart Lichtman, associate attending physician at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

More than half of oncologists who agree that colon cancer patients 65 and older have a more difficult time managing their disease than younger patients also agree that these patients are generally less proactive about researching available treatment options. Seventy-seven percent said that such patients experienced better disease outcomes with a caregiver's involvement due to increased communication. Additionally, caregivers play an important role in providing emotional support, participating in doctors' visits and in decisions about disease management options and providing transportation to appointments.

"It is clear that caregivers are key to ensuring that colon cancer patients 65 and older receive the best care," said Daniel Perry, executive director of Alliance for Aging Research. "Since managing colon cancer can be a complicated

and confusing process especially for the aging population, a caregiver, whether a spouse, child, friend or neighbor, should be actively involved."

"Crossing Jordan" star Miguel Ferrer, who lost his father, José Ferrer, to colon cancer, is partnering with the Alliance for Aging Research in a program called "Caring for the Aging," to educate colon cancer patients and caregivers about the importance of active involvement in the treatment of the disease. This awareness program is sponsored by sanofi-aventis.

"The involvement of my stepmother helped ease my father's decision-making process as he went down a difficult path," Ferrer said. "I encourage all caregivers and family members to become actively involved and ask the right questions to ensure the best possible outcomes for their loved one."