Working and Cancer: The Impact of Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment on Employment, Presenteeism, and Productivity

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BACKGROUND

- Cancer survivors and caregivers experience significant economic burdens and reduced ability to work. These burdens span the range from reduced productivity while at work (presenteeism) to leaving the workforce entirely[1]
  - Estimates of productivity loss of cancer patients and caregivers in the United States in 2020 have been estimated at $308 billion[2]
  - A survey of people with breast cancer or lung cancer and their unpaid caregivers found over one-third of the patients left the workforce after diagnosis along with 15% of the caregivers[3]
  - A claims analysis found employed individuals with late-stage cancer are more likely to leave the workforce and to file short- and/or long-term disability claims[4]
- It is critical to better understand the diverse impacts of a cancer diagnosis on employment and productivity from the patient and caregiver perspectives

OBJECTIVE

To describe the experience of cancer survivors and caregivers regarding working, productivity, lost wages, and other impacts of their cancer journey across a range of cancer types

METHODS

- Data was collected via virtual interviews and the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship's (NCCS) annual State of Survivorship Survey, a nationwide survey of adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers. Survey participants were recruited through an online probability sample and emailed invitations to NCCS email contacts
- Online interview subjects (n=1,303 patients and 506 caregivers) were recruited from across the United States and included a mix of cancer types, stages, time since diagnosis, treatment status, and income
- Respondents could select multiple responses to fully characterize the impact of cancer on their employment

LIMITATIONS

- The results shared are from survey data, including self-reporting of cancer diagnosis and stage, and may be subject to recall bias
- A mix of cancer types and stages were represented and may differ between subgroups considered

RESULTS

- Of these subjects, 53% of patients and 22% of caregivers were 65 years or greater. Among caregivers, 32% were caring for a spouse and 44% were caring for a parent (**Table 1**)
- 47% of patients and 62% of caregivers worked during treatment (**Figure 1**; full-time, part-time, or self-employed)
- Among those working, most patients and caregivers experienced at least one issue that impacted their work and productivity (**Figure 2**)
  - 70% of patients and 83% of caregivers reported one or more issues (data not shown)
  - 16% of patients and 21% of caregivers reported leaving their job (taken early retirement, quit, or been let go or fired)
  - 26% of patients and 37% of caregivers reported missing work and/or working fewer hours (data not shown)
  - An average of 19.56 hours/week were missed by patients and 15.14 hours/week were missed by caregivers (data not shown)
- Impacts varied depending on cancer stage and whether the patient experienced a delay in visiting a doctor (**Figure 3**)
  - Stage I patients were more likely to experience no impact to their work (34%)
  - Stage III and IV patients and caregivers were significantly more likely to say that cancer had a large effect on productivity or completely prevented them from working
    - Among patients: 51% of Stage III and 50% of Stage IV
    - Among caregivers: 47% of Stage III and 52% of Stage IV

Table 1. Population Characteristics

	Patients (n = 1,303)	Caregivers (n = 506)
Age		
20-34	4%	9%
35-44	6%	24%
45-54	12%	23%
55-64	24%	21%
65-74	31%	15%
75-84	20%	7%
Gender		
Male	49%	40%
Female	51%	60%
Stage at diagnosis		
I	34%	15%
II	20%	23%
III	15%	21%
IV	8%	23%
Not discussed	17%	12%
Education		
Less than 4-year degree	54%	61%
4-year degree or more	46%	39%
Income		
<$100k	74%	78%
≥$100k	24%	20%
Employed during treatment		
Yes	47%	62%
No	53%	37%
Relationship to patient		
Your spouse	–	32%
Your parent	–	44%
Your sibling	–	4%
Your child	–	2%
Another family member	–	14%
Your friend	–	4%

Figure 1. Working Status of Respondents During Cancer Treatment

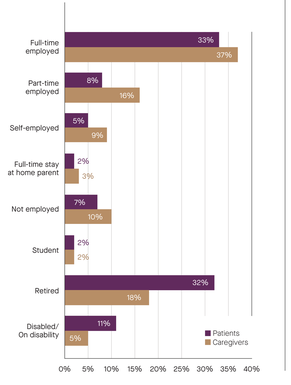


Figure 2. Employment Impacts Experienced (Respondents Could Select Multiple Options)

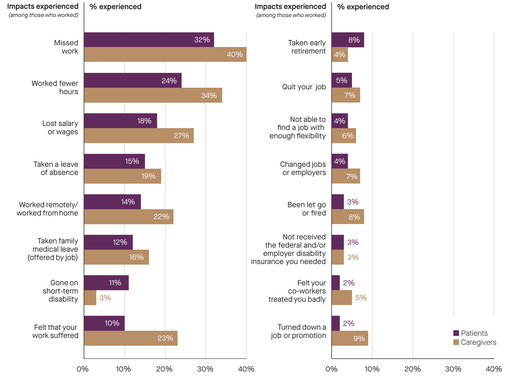
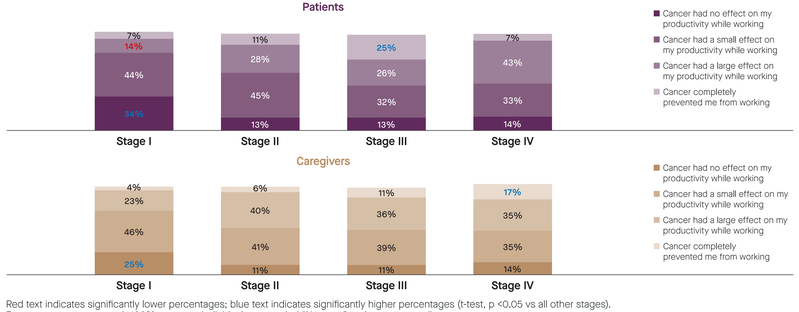


Figure 3. Impacts on Productivity by Stage at Diagnosis



Red text indicates significantly lower percentages; blue text indicates significantly higher percentages (t-test, p <0.05 vs all other stages). Percentages may not reach 100%, as some individuals responded "Not sure" to the corresponding query.

CONCLUSIONS

- Patients with cancer and caregivers experience substantial and diverse impacts on their ability to work
- Caregivers experienced higher levels of impact on their ability to work and productivity, perhaps due to less support for caregivers in the workplace and at home as compared to patients
- Diagnosis at an earlier stage may minimize the impact of cancer on working for patients and caregivers
- Programs to support caregivers in the workplace and beyond may minimize the impact of caregiving on their work and productivity

References

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Disclosures

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