

Cancer Caregiver Perceptions of Patients' Unintentional Weight Loss: Practical and Psychosocial Considerations

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Background

- Unintentional weight loss can accompany cancer and its treatment, yet caregivers' experiences in managing unintentional weight loss are not well understood

Aims

- The objective of this study was to examine the psychosocial impact of patient unintentional weight loss on caregivers

Methods

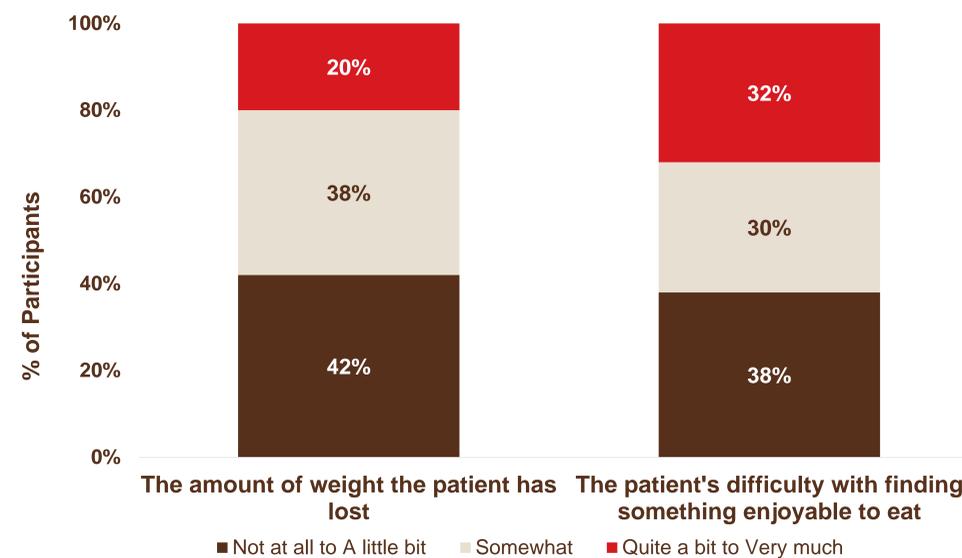
- 125 current caregivers completed an online survey and provided demographic, caregiving, and patient unintentional weight loss history; concern about the amount the patient eats; difficulties with food preparation; and perceived causes of eating problems
- 56 participants (47%) reported the patient they care for experienced unintentional weight loss in the past 6 months; statistical analyses focused on this subset of participants
- We used hierarchical multivariate linear regressions to explore predictors of caregivers' concern about the amount of food the patient eats

Participants

	N = 56	Mean / n	SD / %
Age (years)		55.6	14.1
		Range: 29 – 83	
Female		37	66%
Non-Hispanic white		45	87%
Relationship to patient			
Spouse or partner		37	66%
Parent or parent-in-law		7	13%
Adult child		11	20%
Neighbor		1	2%
Identify as primary caregiver		42	79%
Hours per week spent caring for patient		34.7	26.2
		Range: 2 – 135	
Patient BMI		25.1	5.1
Underweight		3	6%
Healthy Weight		19	37%
Overweight		24	46%
Obese		6	12%
Amount of weight patient lost in past 6 months (pounds)		16	11.7
		Range: 2 – 60	
Patient diagnosis			
Hematologic		14	25%
Breast		6	11%
Lung		5	9%

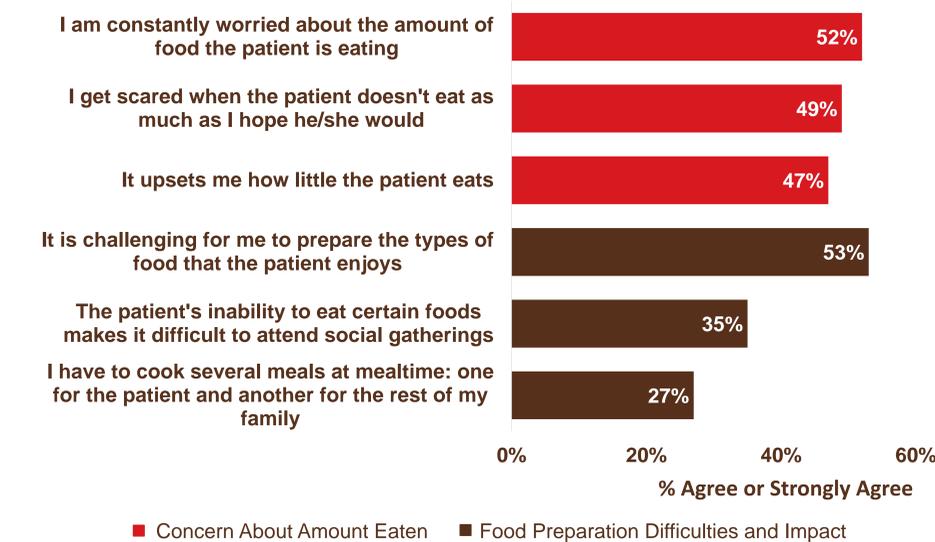
Results

Caregiver Distress from Patient Weight and Appetite Changes



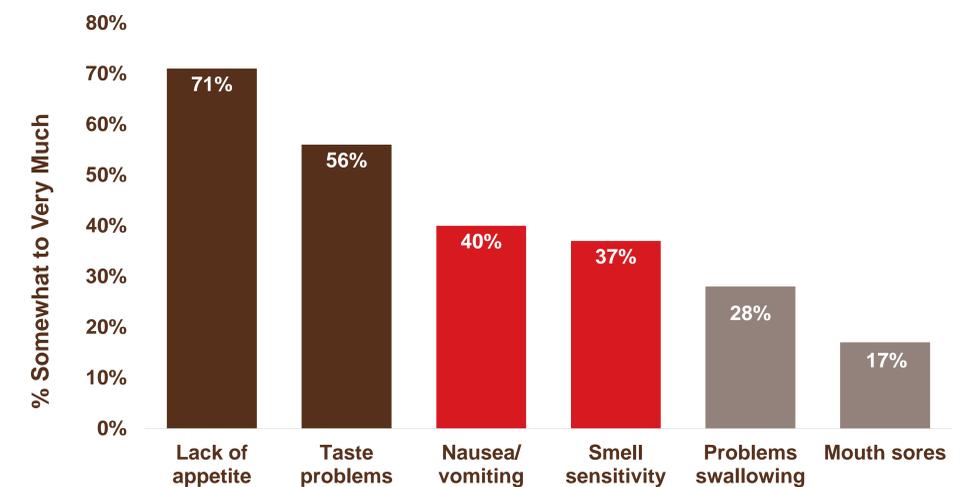
- 58% of caregivers were *somewhat* to *very much* concerned about the amount of weight the patient had lost; 52% about the patient's difficulty with finding something enjoyable to eat

Caregiver Experience with Patient Weight and Appetite Changes



- 52% worried (*agree* or *strongly agree*) about the amount of food the patient eats. 53% reported difficulty preparing food the patient enjoys; 35% believed eating problems interfered with social gatherings; 27% prepared different meals for the patient and the rest of the family

Caregiver Views on Patient Eating Interference



- 71% believed *somewhat* to *very much* that eating difficulties were due to lack of appetite; 56% to changes in the way food tastes; 40% to nausea/vomiting; 37% to sensitivity to food smells; 28% to problems swallowing; 17% to mouth sores

Concerns about Patient Eating are Associated with Difficulty Preparing Food and Belief that Nausea/Smell Sensitivity Impedes Eating

Step and Predictor	Model F	ΔR^2	β	t	Part r
Step 1	4.46	.168			
BMI			-.32	-2.36	-.32*
Step 2	6.01	.306			
Nausea/Sensitivity to smells			.35	2.03	.23*
Food preparation difficulty			.29	2.07	.24*

Total $R^2 = 0.474$, $p < .001$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Significant associations only displayed; associations controlled for patient BMI and general health

- In multivariate analysis, nausea/smell sensitivity and food preparation difficulties were associated with caregivers' concern about the amount of food the patient eats

Implications and Conclusions

- Caregivers to patients with unintentional weight loss experience concern about eating and report difficulty providing food that meets patients' needs
- Concerns about patient eating are associated with difficulty preparing food and belief that nausea/lack of appetite impedes eating
- Advocacy organizations can play an integral role in teaching caregivers how to provide food that appeals to patients with eating difficulties

Acknowledgments

This work is made possible thanks to generous support from Helsinn Therapeutics, Inc.

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