Parenting concerns, parental identity and functional status influence medical treatment decisions of patients with advanced cancer

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Implications for practice and research
- Parents with advanced cancer would benefit from having clinicians engage in explicit discussions regarding their needs, concerns and plans pertaining to parenting as end-of-life gets nearer.
- Future research also should explore some of the positive aspects that may come with parenting while experiencing advanced stages of cancer (eg, concepts of gratitude, emotional closeness and closure, and post-traumatic growth).

Context
The extant literature suggests that parents with advanced cancer with dependent children are prone to higher psychological distress than those without. Past studies have mainly focused on parents with early-stage cancer communicating information about their diagnosis to underage children. Few have explored the realities of raising children while coping with advanced cancer and its effect in the context of palliative and end-of-life care. Park and colleagues undertake an important exploration of such issues with a particular focus on the role of functional status in contributing further to distress.

Methods
This qualitative cross-sectional study relied on semi-structured interviews to explore parental perceptions, concerns, the impact of an advanced/metasstatic cancer diagnosis and treatment demands on parenting roles and treatment-related decision making. Purposive sampling was used to ensure a broad spectrum of experiences. Thematic saturation was reached following the conduct of 46 in-depth interviews, with four of these not included due to cultural diversity issues. The Performance Status Scale was used to measure functional status. Following thematic analysis, several key themes emerged using independent coders and NVivo V.10.

Findings
The final sample (N=42) was composed of parents with various cancer diagnoses, with a significant proportion of women with breast cancer. The four resulting themes included parental concerns about the impact of their illness and death on their children, ‘missing out’ and losses of parental role and responsibilities, maintaining parental responsibilities despite life-limiting illness, and parental identity. The findings suggest that psychological concerns are intensified among parents with poorer functioning status.

References
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