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# Informal caregivers' contributions to self-care for patients treated with oral anticancer agents: A qualitative study

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## Background

The use of oral anticancer agents (OAAs) is increasing worldwide. OAAs can be managed by patients at home, but potential side effects must be considered. For adequate management of OAAs, patients should perform appropriate self-care behaviors. Informal caregivers could support and contribute to patient self-care. This study aimed to explore informal caregivers' contributions to self-care for patients undergoing OAAs.

## Methods

We conducted a qualitative descriptive study with a convenience sample of Italian caregivers (> 18 years) caring for patients treated with OAAs. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using content analysis with a deductive and inductive approach.Two investigators independently performed a two-round coding of the text. We used the three dimensions of self-care maintenance (i.e., behaviors to maintain illness stable), self-care monitoring (i.e., tracking symptoms and side effects), and self-care management (i.e., management of worsening symptoms) of the Middle Range Theory of Self-Care of Chronic Illnesses to group the extracted codes and categories.

## Results

We interviewed 23 caregivers (mean age: 57,2 [± 15]; 48% male; hours of caregiving per week 87,2 [± 60,9]). The content analysis yielded eight categories within the three self-care dimensions. Caregiver contributions to self-care maintenance included activities to support adherence to OAAs, daily life activities, dietary adaptation, and attending oncological visits. Caregiver contributions to self-care monitoring included support for monitoring comorbidities and OAAs-related side effects. Caregiver contributions to self-care management included actions to support the management of OAAs' side effects and emergencies.

## Conclusions

Informal caregivers play a key role in ensuring patients' needs are met and contributing to self-care, including the management of OAAs treatment. When patients do not perform adequate self-care, caregivers' contribution to patient self-care may be critical for improving patient outcomes. Health care providers should support and empower informal caregivers of patients treated with OAAs.

## Legal entity responsible for the study

University of Rome, Tor Vergata.

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## Disclosure

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