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Key Stakeholders’ Experiences of Comorbid Cancer and Dementia/Neurocognitive Disorders in Older Adults:
A Qualitative Evidence Synthesis

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Abstract

Objective: Comorbid cancer and dementia/neurocognitive disorders (cancer-dementia/NCD) has been a growing topic of interest. Meanwhile, previous literature found difficulties in identifying qualitative research exploring the direct experiences of the people involved. This review aimed to systematically identify and synthesize the available qualitative evidence from studies exploring the experiences of people with comorbid cancer and dementia/NCD, their caregivers, and healthcare providers.

Method: A comprehensive search of relevant databases was conducted. Qualitative studies focusing on the experiences of key stakeholders relating to cancer-dementia/NCD were considered for inclusion. Thomas and Harden’s thematic synthesis was undertaken to synthesize extracted data.

Results: Twelve studies were included in the review. Synthesis of the findings from the included papers generated a total of 13 descriptive themes: four themes each relating to people with cancer-dementia/NCD and healthcare providers, and five themes concerning caregivers. The generated themes reflected the unique and complex experiences of comorbid cancer and dementia/NCD from the perspectives of each population group. The importance and need for dementia specific support, underlined by the impact of dementia/NCD on the illness experiences and cancer journey of the people involved was identified as an overarching theme.

Conclusion: Comorbid cancer and dementia/NCD pose unique and complex challenges, and people with cancer-dementia/NCD as well as those who care for them are in need of dementia/NCD specific support throughout the cancer journey. Education to improve dementia awareness, along with change at the organizational level to develop systematic approaches facilitating cancer care considerate of dementia specific needs are crucial.