

# Consequences of Sympathy and Sense of Pity of People Towards Cancer Patients: an Opinion

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## ABSTRACT

When people hear about someone who has cancer, it is not uncommon for them to experience feelings of sympathy and pity. However, while these reactions are well-intentioned, they can have negative consequences for the patient. Sympathy is a feeling or emotional response characterized by compassion, understanding, and concern for the suffering or hardship experienced by another person. It involves the ability to share in the feelings of others and to genuinely care about their well-being. This article will explore the negative consequences of sympathy and pity reactions of people toward cancer patients.

**Keywords:** Sympathy, Pity, Cancer, Oncology

**INTRODUCTION:**

DCancer is a devastating disease that affects millions of people worldwide. It is a condition that can leave individuals feeling isolated, scared, and alone (1). When people hear about someone who has cancer, it is not uncommon for them to experience feelings of sympathy and pity. However, while these reactions are well-intentioned, they can have negative consequences for the patient. This article will explore the negative consequences of sympathy and pity reactions of people toward cancer patients.

Sympathy is a feeling or emotional response characterized by compassion, understanding, and concern for the suffering or hardship experienced by another person. It involves the ability to share in the feelings of others and to genuinely care about their well-being. When someone feels sympathy towards another individual, they recognize and acknowledge the pain, struggles, or challenges that the person is going through. It goes beyond simply feeling sorry for someone; it involves a deeper connection and a desire to provide comfort and support. In the context of cancer patients, sympathy plays a significant role in providing emotional support and understanding (2). Also, Pity is a feeling of sorrow or compassion for someone who is perceived as suffering or in a difficult situation. In the context of cancer patients, pity can arise when others empathize with the challenges and hardships they face due to their illness. When someone feels pity for a cancer patient, they may feel sorry for the person's physical suffering, the impact the disease has on their daily life, or the potential limitations it imposes on their future. Pity often stems from a genuine concern for the well-being and a recognition of the adversity the individual is going through (3).

**Possible consequences:**

One of the negative consequences of sympathy and pity reactions is the stigmatization of cancer patients. When people view cancer patients as weak or helpless, it can lead to a sense of shame and isolation for the patients. This stigma can be particularly harmful when it comes

to seeking treatment and support. Research has shown that cancer patients who experience stigma are less likely to seek treatment and support (4, 5). They may also experience more negative emotional and psychological outcomes, such as depression and anxiety. This can ultimately have a significant impact on their overall well-being. Another negative consequence of sympathy and pity reactions is the infantilization of cancer patients. When people treat cancer patients as helpless children, it can be demeaning and disempowering. This can make patients feel even more isolated and unsupported, as they may feel like their autonomy and agency have been taken away. Infantilization can also lead to a sense of dependence. When patients are constantly told that they need help and support, they may begin to feel like they cannot manage on their own. This can be particularly problematic if it prevents patients from taking an active role in their own care and recovery. Research has shown that patients who are more active in their own care and recovery have better outcomes than those who are more passive (6).

By encouraging patients to take an active role in their own care, we can help to promote better outcomes for their health and well-being. Cancer can have a significant impact on a patient's mental health, and sympathy and pity reactions can exacerbate this impact. Patients who receive pity and sympathy may feel like they are being treated as victims, which can contribute to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. This can be particularly harmful when it comes to the mental health of cancer patients. Depression and anxiety are common among cancer patients, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness can exacerbate these conditions. This can lead to a cycle of negative emotional and psychological outcomes, which can ultimately have a significant impact on a patient's overall well-being (2).

Sympathy and pity reactions can also have a negative impact on the patient-provider relationship. When healthcare providers view cancer patients as helpless victims, it can lead to a breakdown in communication and trust. Patients may feel like their providers are not taking them seriously, or that they are not being treat-

ed with dignity and respect. This can ultimately have a significant impact on the quality of care that cancer patients receive. When patients feel like they are not being heard or taken seriously, they may be less likely to communicate important information to their providers. This can lead to missed diagnoses, delayed treatment, and ultimately, worse outcomes (7).

### What we can do?

It is essential to approach cancer patients with sensitivity and awareness, recognizing that they are not defined by their diagnosis. Rather than expressing pity or sympathy, it is important to offer empathy and support. This means listening to the patient, validating their experiences, and working with them to develop a plan for their care and recovery. Healthcare providers can play a critical role in mitigating the negative consequences of sympathy and pity reactions. By treating patients with dignity and respect, providers can help to foster a sense of agency and empowerment. They can also work to create a supportive environment that encourages patients to take an active role in their own care. Education can also be an important tool for addressing the negative consequences of sympathy and pity reactions. By raising awareness of the impact that these reactions can have, we can help to create a more compassionate and supportive society for cancer patients. It is important to recognize that cancer patients are more than their diagnosis. They are individuals with unique experiences, strengths, and challenges. By focusing on the person rather than the disease, we can help to create a more positive and supportive environment for cancer patients (8).

One way to approach cancer patients with empathy and support is to focus on their strengths and resilience. Cancer patients are often faced with many challenges, but they also demonstrate incredible strength and resilience in the face of adversity. By acknowledging these strengths and empowering patients to take an active role in their care, we can help to promote a more positive and supportive environment. Support groups and peer-to-peer networks can also be an important source

of support for cancer patients. These networks provide a sense of community and belonging, and can help to reduce feelings of isolation and stigma. They can also provide patients with valuable resources and information about their care and recovery.

It is also important to recognize that the impact of sympathy and pity reactions can vary depending on cultural and social contexts. Different cultural norms and values can influence how cancer patients and their families perceive and respond to these reactions. It is important for healthcare providers to be aware of these cultural and social contexts and to adapt their approach accordingly. In addition, it is important to recognize that cancer patients are not the only ones affected by sympathy and pity reactions. Family members and caregivers of cancer patients may also experience these reactions, which can have a significant impact on their mental and emotional well-being. By providing support to family members and caregivers, we can help to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for cancer patients and their loved ones.

Overall, it is important to approach cancer patients with sensitivity and empathy, recognizing the unique challenges and strengths that they bring to their care and recovery. By working together to create a supportive and inclusive environment, we can help to mitigate the negative consequences of sympathy and pity reactions and promote better outcomes for cancer patients and their families.

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