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Caregiver burden and bereavement of family caregivers who lost terminally ill cancer patients

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Objectives: Family caregivers (FCs) provide hospice care to terminally ill cancer patients in China. However, few studies investigating caregiver burden and bereavement experiences as a time-continuing process have been conducted in China. The purpose of this study was to identify the main elements of caring and bereavement experiences of FCs caring for a patient with terminally ill cancer.

Methods: Twenty qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with FCs from one hospice unit in Shenzhen, Southern China. A content analysis of the FCs' interviews was conducted to describe their experiences.

Results: A framework comprising following seven principal themes was developed through content analysis of the FC interviews: symptoms of the illness, truth-telling process, attitudes toward death, "color" of the death, social and professional support, moment of death, grief and loss.

Significance of Results: The analysis showed that caregiving might positively or negatively influence the bereavement process and is useful for FCs who might experience bereavement complications.