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Title: Collateral damage: Depressive symptoms in the spouses of COPD patients

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Body: Background: Depression is a common comorbidity in COPD patients. However, little is known about the psychological impact COPD in the patients' spouses. Objectives To evaluate the presence of depressive symptoms in the spouses of COPD patients and their association with disease severity and exacerbation frequency. Methods: Patients' spouses were contacted during the follow up visits of COPD patients included in a previous study on depressive symptoms in COPD. Demographic characteristics, smoking habit and medical history of the spouses were recorded and their depressive symptoms were evaluated using Beck's Depression inventory (BDI). Results: 202 patients' spouses were included to the study and 69 (34.1%) had clinically significant depressive symptoms. The BDI score of the patients spouses correlated to the BDI score of COPD patients ($r=0.422$, $p<0.001$) to the degree of airflow limitation as expressed by FEV1 ($r=-0.510$, $p<0.001$) and to the number of exacerbations ($r=0.553$, $p<0.001$) and hospitalizations for COPD exacerbations per year ($r=0.458$, $p<0.001$). Spouses of patients with severe and very severe COPD had higher BDI score compared to those of patients with mild and moderate disease [8.00 (4.00, 12.00) vs 8.00 (6.00, 13.50) vs 13.50 (8.00, 22.00) vs 29.00 (24.00, 39.00) $p<0.001$] for the spouses of patients with COPD stage I to IV respectively. Finally, spouses of frequent exacerbators reported significantly more depressive symptoms compared to those of non-frequent exacerbators [8.00 (6.00, 16.00) vs. 22.00 (16.75, 26.00) $p<0.001$]. Conclusions: This study shows that COPD is a major cause of psychological burden in patients' spouses. Therefore, prompt psychological evaluation and support should be offered to couples.