



Life Meaning in Patients Diagnosed with End-Stage Liver Cancer: An Interpretive Phenomenological Approach

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BACKGROUND

- ❖ Primary liver cancer (PLC) is an increasingly critical healthcare issue in part because of Hepatitis B (HBV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) infection, excessive alcohol consumption, and continuing obesity.
- ❖ Existential experiences such as illness and death have a way of stopping someone in his/her tracks in order to pause and reflect on life's important meaning.
- ❖ Patients with end-stage liver cancer are among those who are confronted with a time bound terminal diagnosis. For these patients, searching for and finding meaning in life, peace, and hope is an essential part of life's final stage.

Purpose

To present a synthesized review of the literature regarding the existential needs for meaning and purpose in end-stage liver cancer patients.

Method

- ❖ Key words used to search for the English research articles included: meaning in life, liver cancer, cancer, end of life, palliative, and hospice in CINAHL, EBSCOHost, Medline, and Medscape.
- ❖ Ninety peer-reviewed publications of cancer patients with respect to life's meaning were found, none in end stage liver cancer patients.
- ❖ Forty seven articles were eliminated and forty three articles were included in the synthesis that met the inclusion criteria: cancer patients that are terminally diagnosed who are seeking purpose and meaning in life.

Significance

- ❖ Patient care necessitates the ability to look beyond the patient's diagnosis, see the person as a whole, and understand the meaning that the experience holds for him/her.
- ❖ The search for meaning in life can contribute to the development of meaning-based interventions in the context of cancer.
- ❖ The knowledge generated can be used in the planning of holistic care services, increase the awareness among healthcare professionals in honoring the remaining precious moments of dying patients by respecting their humanity, preserving dignity, ensuring comfort, and advocating optimum palliative care.
- ❖ Knowledge can empower health care providers to assist individuals that are approaching death and their families to do so in a way that is meaningful rather than simply being tolerable.
- ❖ Nurses and other healthcare professionals may assist patients for necessary referrals to counselors and chaplains who could provide strength and comfort during life's final stages.

Interpretive Phenomenology

- ❖ Phenomenology brings to the fore the perceptions of human persons regarding essential truths that are grounded in their lived experiences.
- ❖ It allows for the description of the phenomena surrounding human existence and facilitates the understanding of person's internally experienced and processed meaning. The focus is on the uniqueness of one's experience and its corresponding meaning or meanings.
- ❖ French Existentialist Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) envisions the human person as *homo viator*, one who is on a journey, a traveler, a pilgrim.
- ❖ Life is a pilgrimage that goes beyond the present world and ultimately leads to God. This is transcendence. Marcel professes that the intrinsic value of the human life is a gift from God that is meant to be shared with others.
- ❖ Humans make a personal choice for an intimate communion with God and for the genuine dialogue with others in an inter-human relationship. Humans recognize the reality of something more than what this world and life can offer. Death is not the end.
- ❖ Authentic existence here on earth gives humans hope, a bridge to go beyond a deeper and fuller intimacy in the afterlife with the Divinity.
- ❖ For Marcel, to exist is to co-exist. Existence thus means presence for others and for the Other. We are *being-in-the-world-with-others*, totally engaged in an actual and conscious communion with Being (God) and with other human beings through love, hope, fidelity, and availability.

Jean Watson's Caring Science

- ❖ Watson's Caring Science exemplifies the act of caring in an interpersonal way, stands for values that honor and respect human capacity, preserving human dignity, spirituality, and wholeness in the midst of threats and crises of life and death. All of which transcend illness, diagnosis, condition, and settings that were, and remain enduring and timeless across time and space, changes in systems, society, civilization, and science.
- ❖ The inter-subjective human-to-human process teaches the individual to be human by identifying oneself with others, whereby the humanity of one is reflected in the other.
- ❖ Caring moment becomes transpersonal when two persons (nurse and patient) together with their unique life stories and phenomenal field (perception) become a focal point in time.
- ❖ It implies the uniqueness of self and others, of the moment and the coming together as mutual and reciprocal, each fully embodied and capable of transcending the moment and being open to new possibilities.
- ❖ Nurses participate in their patients' realm of experiences in finding meaning and purpose, in a way that the patient and nurse are "in tune" together and are aware of the uniqueness of each other.

IMPLICATIONS

- ❖ Understanding how individuals attach meaning would enable nurses to help patients adjust to difficult situations such as approaching death.
- ❖ Identification of concepts and subsequent development of quantitative tools to measure constructs in patients with the same illness, prognosis, and profile.
- ❖ Aid in future clinical research related to the meaning in life and the predictive factors in patients with cancer.
- ❖ Development of continuing education programs for nurses and healthcare providers related to the meaning in life.



Results

- ❖ Meaning in life is a multi-dimensional concept involving the value and purpose of life, and the motivation to find both.
- ❖ It is a matter of living authentically, that is, a certain quality, depth, abundance, and intensity thus, making life worth living.
- ❖ The way a person becomes aware of the changed circumstances and how he/she deals with this awareness, is decisive for the way the individual continues to live.
- ❖ Hope has been found to be a dominant component when terminally ill patients describe their lived experience.
- ❖ A higher sense of meaning has been associated with greater social, psychological, emotional adjustments, and have a positive impact on the quality of life.
- ❖ Existential meaning-focused interventions have shown to effectively improve well-being.
- ❖ A successful search for meaning may contribute to one's ability to cope with sufferings.
- ❖ Regardless of coping mechanism, patients attempt to find meaning, inner peace, and hope during the uncertainty inherent to the fight of cancer.

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Life's meaning is a multi-dimensional concept associated with greater social, psychological, and emotional adjustments that relate to the quality, depth, abundance, and intensity of life.
- ❖ Best supportive care for end-stage liver cancer patients should include efforts to assist them in search for meaning.
- ❖ Intuiting that patients with end-stage liver cancer would in general be affirming the value of hope and the greater purpose in continuing to live despite the inevitability of death, Marcel's existential phenomenological approach is a fitting philosophical framework that can dialogue with Jean Watson's nursing framework in caring for the dying.

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