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Life after a cancer diagnosis: How do we define quality of life and compliance?

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Scientific literature about Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL) and compliance in cancer care seems to be as extensive as incomplete. On the one hand, we have a comprehensive body of knowledge about HRQoL and compliance indicators from a bio-medical viewpoint. On the other hand, we are just extending what we know about the subjective perception of patient and professionals. We developed two mixed-methods studies aimed to explore the personal definition of HRQoL in breast cancer patients (n=51) and nurses (n=21) and to evaluate how breast cancer patients (n=67) construe their coping styles and their adjustment to treatment after diagnosis. We assessed HRQoL, coping styles and compliance through structured interviewed and standardized questionnaire the former were analyzed by standard statistics, the latter by computer-aided qualitative data analysis software. In the first study, patients described HRQOL in terms of psycho-social effects of cancer, whereas nurses usually talked about side effects and physiological response to treatment. Both the sub-groups find difficult to hypothesize the narratives of the other subgroup. Patients who showed different themes in describing HRQOL from those of nurses, exhibited significant higher distress ($t=3.28$; $p<0.05$) as compared to other patients. In the second study, we highlighted a significant difference in anxiety and depression ($p<0.05$) with respect to being involved in a relationship or not, change in the coping style after diagnosis or not and adaptability of coping style in facing different problems and finding different resources. Results seemingly urge professionals to deeply explore subjective experiences of cancer patients.

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