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Experiences of chemotherapy induced pain and pain impact in the lifeworld of women treated for breast cancer

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Background: Breast cancer survivors make up a growing population facing treatment that poses longstanding side-effects including chemotherapy-related body function changes and/or pain. There is limited knowledge of patients' lived experiences of chemotherapy-induced pain (CHIP).

Objective: To explore CHIP and any longstanding pain experiences in the lifeworld of breast cancer survivors.

Interventions/Methods: Fifteen women participated in a follow-up interview a year after having experienced CHIP. They were interviewed from a lifeworld perspective; the interviews were analyzed through guided phenomenology reflection.

Results: A past perspective: CHIP is often described in metaphors, leads to changes in a patient's lifeworld, and impacts lived time. The women become entirely dependent on others but at the same time feel isolated and alone. Existential pain was experienced as increased vulnerability. Present perspective: Pain engages same parts of the body, but at a lower intensity than during CHIP. The pain creates time awareness. Expected normality in relationships/daily life has not yet been achieved, and a painful existence emerges in-between health and illness. Future perspective: There are expectations of pain continuing and there is insecurity regarding who to turn to in such cases. A painful awareness emerges about one's own and others' fragile existence.

Conclusions: Experiencing CHIP can impact the lifeworld of women with a history of breast cancer. After CHIP, there are continued experiences of pain which trigger insecurity about whether one is healthy.

Implications for Practice: Cancer survivors would likely benefit from communication and information about and evaluation of CHIP.

Biography

Susanne Hellerstedt Börjesson is a registered nurse and PhD-student at the Inst. for Public Health and Caring Sciences, Uppsala University. Experiences of chemotherapy-induced pain (CHIP) in women treated with adjuvant treatment for breast cancer is in focus for her research. In one mixed method study she captured experiences of CHIP in women with breast cancer and CHIP impact on daily life during treatment. In a second study she made a follow up interview with the same women one year after completed treatment. This to investigate their memory of CHIP any residual pain as well as their thoughts of residual pain in the future.

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