

Everyday life of people with advanced cancer: Activity, time, location and experience

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Introduction; Today increasing numbers of people with advanced cancer live at home for extended periods of time towards the end of life. Advanced cancer impacts the individuals' capacity to engage in everyday activities. For example bodily deterioration may lead to a variety of losses from basic functional skills to the ability to maintain social roles. While there is an awareness of the problems an advanced cancer may cause in everyday life, little is known about what people actually do under such circumstances. More specifically, what activities they engage in and how these are experienced. If palliative occupational therapy is to support people with advanced cancer in living at home for as long as possible, it is necessary to ascertain specific knowledge about the activities that occupy the daily life of people with advanced cancer and how these activities are meaningful to the individual.

The objective of this study was to describe and explore the everyday activities of people with advanced cancer in relation to time, location, social engagement and experience.

Methods; Forty-five adult participants were sampled from an oncological out-patient unit representing the three cancer diagnosis, lung- colon- and breast cancer. Data was collected by a Time Geographical Method including diaries and interviews. The data were organized by a specific software programme producing time-use graphs and all data were analyzed with a constant comparative method.

The results show that the participants spent most of their time at home, with activities dominated by self-care and leisure including limited social engagement. Creating personal rhythms of routine and novel activities was identified as significant to the participants' experiences of satisfaction in daily life.

In conclusion although people with advanced cancer are limited in their daily activities they strive to create rhythms and continuance through their occupational engagement which facilitates their satisfaction in everyday living.

Contributions and implications; this study demonstrates how activities can potentially be used by people with advanced cancer to create structure and content in the life that remains to them. Therefore palliative occupational therapy needs to support people with advanced cancer in establishing and maintaining activity rhythms.