

Engagement in activities: narrative ways of meaning-making when living with advanced cancer

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Introduction: It has been proposed that humans understand themselves and their participation in a social/material world through narrative processes. Furthermore, scholars suggest that in times of difficult life transitions and trauma, such as advanced cancer, people draw upon narrative forms of meaning-making. Moreover, people tell or enact stories to explore and create meaning of experiences of disruption and change in order to find alternative directions in life. Consequently, it is important to gain insight to how daily activity is related to meaning-making and may be a resource in addressing the challenges of living with advanced cancer.

The **objective** of this study was to explore and understand how people with advanced cancer create meaning and manage everyday life through engagement in activity.

Methods: Forty-five adult participants with advanced cancer were sampled from an oncological out-patient unit. Data from all participants was collected by use of diaries. Furthermore, a purposive sub-sample of seven participants was subject to qualitative interviews and participant-observations conducted in the participants' home environments. Interpretive analysis was conducted using narrative theory.

The Results identified that the participants created a meta-narrative of "saying goodbye in a good way" negotiated within the individuals' socio-cultural life context. In addition a narrative of "I am healthy although I am sick" was identified as an arena for exploring the contrast between simultaneously feeling well and severely ill. "My little Mecca" was identified as activities forging enriching experiences and possibilities for refuge.

In conclusion the results show how engagement in activities may function as a resource for people in conditions of advanced cancer to fashion narratives and construct meaning in the life that remains to them.

This study **contributes** to the understanding of relationships between engagement in activity and meaning-making. In extension it identifies how people through activity can embody their situation while living under ambivalent circumstances. These insights may be of value for clinical practice by empowering people through opportunities of engagement in activity, to take agency and handle complex situations, in circumstances of life-threatening illness.