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Using autobiography to explore occupational transitions of those living with or beyond cancer.

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As a result of advances in treatment, screening and prevention, the prevalence of people living with cancer has increased and this trend is expected to continue. Current research has reported that people have problems with everyday activities such as getting back to work; reestablishing or creating new routines; making sense of their lives and coping with the emotional and physical impact. It is also acknowledged that current follow up care does not meet cancer survivor's full range of occupational needs, failing to provide practical, physical, emotional, financial and day to day support. For this reason cancer survival has climbed the political agenda. The UK Cancer Reform Strategy alongside the Cancer Survivorship Strategy indicates the need for more research in this area.

In order to understand the lived experience from the perspective of the individual, this research used a unique and creative process to explore the occupational lives and transitions of those living with cancer.

Over a six month period ten people living with or beyond cancer were invited to produce their autobiography using a variety of creative media. Each participant was provided with a range of autobiographical tools such as memorabilia, photographs, music, journals etc. to elicit the life writing process as a form of creative intervention. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach was used to interpret the resulting narrative to explore and understand the occupational transitions throughout a lifetime.

This paper will present findings in relation to the narrative explored. It will focus on occupational identity, direction and choices of the participants and the circumstances and settings within which these are lived out. As well as illustrating occupational transitions, the paper will also present findings that indicate how the process of creating an autobiography enables the individual to make sense, construct and attach meaning to their past, present and future occupational lives. The application of these findings to practice will also be alluded to.