

Betydelser av bröstcancer i ett livssammanhang

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to describe and analyse how a group of women experience that their every-day lives are affected during and after primary breast cancer treatment. The thesis is a consecutive, longitudinal study that takes an explorative qualitative approach. Seventy-one women younger than 60 years of age with primary breast cancer were consecutively included. The women were interviewed four or five times over a period of 4 to 6 years from end of radiotherapy. The analyses of the interviews were inspired by grounded theory and narrative analysis.

The thesis encompasses four papers. Paper I focused on the women's contact with health care. The results of this study indicate that it is crucial for patients in a vulnerable situation to be admitted into a supportive system – 'admitted into a helping plan' – that, more or less explicitly, displays a well-thought-out plan of care. This is a process built on individual relationships with members of the health-care staff, but it ends up in a relationship to health care as a helping system, a 'safe haven' to attach to. Study II explored the women's ideas about what motivated and discouraged their return to work. The results illustrate that the meaning of work fluctuates over time and that the processes of returning to work are conditioned by the patients' individual life situations. Returning to work was regarded as an important part of the healing process because of how it generated and structured the women's everyday lives. Study III examined how life was lived and valued during and after treatment for breast cancer compared to pre-cancer life. The analysis showed that being afflicted with breast cancer was evaluated from a context of the women's former everyday lives and stressed that how the women experienced breast cancer was a matter of personal circumstances. Study IV focused on how the women experienced and dealt with their altered bodies. The results showed that the women followed three different body-mind trajectories that depended to a significant extent on the severity of side effects and bodily alterations that resulted from their treatments.

Being afflicted by breast cancer implies vulnerability and losses, but it can also involve benefits and provide new perspectives on life. How the overall breast cancer experience is valued seems to be very much a matter of circumstances in everyday life. This thesis highlights circumstances that focus in particular on contacts with health care, the body, the work situation, and the family situation.

Keywords

breast cancer, psycho-oncology, oncology, everyday life, patient perspective, gender, sick leave, work, side effects, attachment, 'critical incidents'

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