

A Qualitative Analysis of Childhood Cancer Patients' Experiences of a Structured Exercise Program

Dennis Wilke, Norbert W. Paul, Elias Dreismickenbecker, Marie Neu, Jörg Faber
University Medical Centre, Johannes Gutenberg - University Mainz, Germany



BACKGROUND

- Childhood cancer patients are exposed to physical inactivity, fatigue, and reduced health-related quality of life
- *FORTEe* is a large RCT evaluating personalized and standardized exercise interventions for these patients
- In this work package, we examine patients' experiences of these interventions and effects on well-being, coping and self-image

Main Project



Get Strong to Fight Childhood Cancer

An Exercise Intervention for Children and Adolescents Undergoing Anti-Cancer Treatment

METHODS

- Applying a **qualitative, ethnographic** approach, we ...
- Data is analyzed using an interpretive **phenomenological** approach

- ... conduct **qualitative interviews** with patients and their parents
- ... conduct **participant observations** during exercise sessions
- ... keep **ethnographic field notes** on informal patient visits

RESULTS

- All patients reported **positive experiences and effects** related to:
 - their mood, overall wellbeing and health-related quality of life
 - self-image and coping capacities
 - their hospital stay and everyday clinic life
- ... as well as an **appreciation of the study implementation**:
 - consideration of their individual perspectives and situational needs
 - supervised training together with exercise therapists
- **Limitations**:
 - Positive experiences are situationally limited by therapy-related burdens
 - During recruitment, some patients were reluctant whether to participate or not
 - These are preliminary results of a small sample, single-center study

Participant Voices

"When I do sports, I notice that I am not only ill."

Patient, F/16

"Sometimes there are things I don't feel like doing, but when I do them later, I realise: I like them."

Patient, F/6

„[...] it distracts him from everyday chemotherapy, and for him, it's a very, very important building block [...]"

Mother of a patient, M/10

All quotes translated from German

CONCLUSIONS

- Exercise therapy can **mitigate disruptive experiences** by providing patients with opportunities ...
- Patients' positive appraisal of the individualized study implementation hints at the necessity to **involve them in the design** of exercise therapy and to **tailor it to their needs**
- **Qualitative research** can play a crucial role in **assessing patient's experiences** of clinical interventions and can thus contribute to their **ethical conduct**

- ... to exercise **agency** and experience **self-efficacy**
- ... to (re)connect to their **"life before"** the illness
- ... to revise their **self-image**

Contact

Dennis Wilke, MA Sociology

Institute for the History, Philosophy and Ethics of Medicine
University Medical Centre, Johannes Gutenberg-University
Mainz, Germany

dennis.wilke@unimedizin-mainz.de

