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### **The Patient Symptom Experience in Stage 4 Chronic Kidney Disease: A Qualitative Study**

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**Background:** Studies indicate that symptoms attributable to impaired kidney function are important determinants of quality of life and functional status in patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD). Accordingly, symptom assessment and subsequent control are prerequisites to high-quality care in this patient population. Whilst symptom burden in patients with advanced CKD managed without dialysis has been likened to that of palliative care cancer populations, there is little information about the nature and range of symptoms in earlier stages of the CKD trajectory. This paper reports the preliminary findings of the first phase of a PhD study aimed at exploring the symptom experience in patients with Stage 4 CKD.

**Methods:** Eighteen semi-structured patient interviews were conducted, using an interview schedule developed specifically to guide discussion. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify symptom themes and patterns across the patient experiences.

**Results:** Patients reported a wide range of symptoms, with a total of 34 different symptom themes emerging from the data. Themes could be broadly classified into physical symptoms, such as 'Tire easily', 'Reduced hand grip strength', 'Feeling cold', 'Unsteadiness on my feet', and 'Skin that heals poorly'; and psychological symptoms, such as 'Forgetfulness', 'Feeling depressed', 'Changes in self-perception', 'A sensation of slowing down', and 'Irritability'. When questioned further, patients indicated that they would not usually report their symptoms to clinicians.

**Conclusion:** This study suggests that patients with Stage 4 CKD may have a high symptom burden. The finding that patients did not routinely report their symptoms emphasizes a need for nephrology nurses to incorporate symptom assessment into routine clinical consultations.

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