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Patients' Experiences of Initiating Unplanned Hemodialysis

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Background: Many patients with end stage kidney failure initiate dialysis in an unplanned fashion and experience increased morbidity, mortality and make greater demands on health care resources. To deliver care appropriate to the needs of these patients it is imperative to gain insight into the perspective of each individual.

Aim: To describe the meaning of the phenomenon “initiating hemodialysis in an unplanned fashion” experienced by the participants.

Design: The study used a lifeworld perspective with a descriptive phenomenological approach.

Participants: Five patients (M 4, F 1), with experiences of the phenomenon were recruited from two dialysis units in southern Sweden.

Approach: Individual in-depth interviews were undertaken, recorded and transcribed. The texts were analyzed according to Giorgi's method.

Findings: The essence of the phenomenon was described as a life situation characterized by a rapid decline in health and kidney function leading to unplanned initiation of hemodialysis, which resulted in not really being able to understand what happened. The sudden initiation of hemodialysis affected each patient in various ways and gave rise to thoughts of life's meaning. Support from others, acceptance and inner strength were helpful. Patients wished for more in-depth conversations with health care professionals.

Conclusion: Psychological support is critical. Health care professionals need to have the time and the necessary skills in communication and empathetic listening to understand the psychological trauma each patient goes through in the unplanned setting, even if otherwise seemingly well-prepared for dialysis.

Implications: To get a better understanding of the psychological trauma experienced by patients initiating unplanned hemodialysis.

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