How do English-speaking Cancer Patients Conceptualise Personhood?
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Abstract

Introduction: Understanding personhood or “what makes you, you” is pivotal to the provision of person-centred care. Yet the manner that personhood is conceived amongst patients varies significantly. This study aims to investigate conceptions of personhood in a multiracial, multicultural, multireligious setting. Materials and Methods: A mixed-methods study was conducted at National Cancer Centre Singapore, from January 2013 to April 2013. We used a validated questionnaire where English-speaking oncology patients rated the importance of 26 features of “personhood” on a 10-point Likert scale from 0 to 9, with 9-points being extremely important. This was followed by a semi-structured interview. Analysis of transcripts using the Grounded Theory revealed original data that inspired novel ideas about the nature of personhood, which precipitated a further study in April 2014. Results: Our initial study of 100 patients revealed that personhood is conceived in a unique and novel manner. To study this, we interviewed a further 40 patients using a supplemental question to our original questionnaire. Our data affirmed our initial findings and evidenced a change in conceptions of personhood. Conclusion: Our evidence supports the Ring Theory of Personhood, which suggests that personhood is defined by innate, individual, relational, societal elements. It also evidences that personhood is temporally and contextually sensitive allowing for better appreciation of the evolving goals of care that frequently occur at end-of-life. Most importantly, this study reminds healthcare professionals on the importance of “treating persons” and looking beyond familial interests in maintaining the interests and dignity of the patient.

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