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Background

Research shows that being a back patient can be associated with great personal cost, and that back patients who undergo spine fusion surgery, experience particularly problematic illness trajectories. Many patients not only struggle with the feeling of being send back and forth between healthcare professionals, they also struggle with existential challenges related to living with pain for many years. The patients' individual lifeworld perspective needs yet to be explored.

Aim

To explore how patients undergoing spine fusion surgery experience their illness trajectory.

Method

The data analysis is inspired by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutic theory of interpretation. Data were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews.

Results

Patients' experience their illness trajectory as prolonged and uncoordinated. Within this uncoordinated and inconsistent course of action within the healthcare system patients are left with the feeling of not being recognised as individuals living in constant pain. The lack of inclusion of patients' lifeworld perspective means that patients hold back their challenges related to life with back pain to avoid being an inconvenience. For the patients this lack of involvement and verbalisation creates an existential insecurity expressed as a sense of 'disappearing' and being 'invisible' which is threatening the patients' identity.

Conclusion

It is suggested that patients' lifeworld-experiences are given priority when the health care professionals are dealing with patients suffering from severe back pain undergoing spine fusion surgery. To secure the patient's existential and individual needs it is important that aspects related to the patients' experiences of their illness trajectory are included in the communication.

Keywords

Lifeworld, severe back pain, spine fusion surgery, invisibility, identity