

“I GOT MY LIFE BACK!” – PATIENTS’ EXPERIENCES ON BEING CURED FOR HEPATIS C: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FATIGUE AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN A GROUP OF DANISH PATIENTS

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Background: Fatigue is among the leading patient-reported symptoms of chronic hepatitis C (CHC). Studies have shown that this leads to significant impairment of quality of life (QOL), subjective well-being and everyday functioning. The aim of this study was to explore the impact of this in patients’ everyday life.

Methods: Ten qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted in January-April 2016. Four men and six women aged 27- 66 years (mean 51 years) participated. All were cured for CHC after treatment in 2015. Six participants had acquired the infection by injecting drug use. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using systematic text condensation.

Results: The main theme was that CHC had defined everyday life for all participants. Being cured unleashed feelings of guilt, shame and anxiety and brought a sense of regained control. Some felt this as a life changing experience.

Fatigue had been debilitating for some participants and reduced fatigue led to significant changes in everyday life since they now felt able to endure more physically and psychologically. Things they used to plan but never carried out were more frequently executed and a growing sense of self-confidence motivated some to various changes in lifestyle. Furthermore being able to fully engage and initiate social activities with family and friends let to a growing sense of meaningfulness in life.

Conclusion: Being cured for CHC seemed to affect all participants’ sense of self and control positively - even though the significance of this varied. For participants with debilitating fatigue the cure made it possible to live an active everyday life with a greater sense of meaningfulness and control. It was remarkable that all participants experienced an overall positive impact and the study indicates that this was due to a complex interplay by several factors – not merely a reduction in fatigue.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Gilead supported the study through an unrestricted grant.