

Behind the diagnosis is another human being: Dialogic communication in dietary counselling

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Introduction

Cancer patients are at risk of malnutrition and weight loss, associated with reduced food intake and metabolic derangements. Pain, fatigue, nausea, and appetite loss make eating difficult. This can result in limited effect of treatment and decreased quality of life.

The number of malnourished cancer patients is high, and therefore it seems relevant to consult a dietitian in order to get dietary counseling. Yet little is known about the significance of communication in helping cancer patients with their eating difficulties.

Through a dialogic approach this action research project puts emphasis on participant involvement, learning and action in practice.

The project is carried out in collaboration with two dietitians and is inspired by Carl Rogers' client-centred therapy, William Miller and Stephen Rollnick's motivational interviewing, and Helle Alrø's approach to dialogue in helping relationships.

Objective

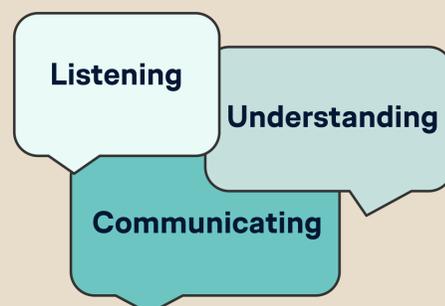
The aim of this project is to explore **how dialogic communication** and involvement can be used in **dietary counselling** in cancer care to **help cancer patients eat properly**.

Methods

A central element of this action research project are research circles where the two dietitians and the researcher meet consecutively to reflect on, and develop the dietitians' communication with cancer patients.

In addition, 20 cancer patients with relatives have participated. Their meeting with a dietitian has been video-recorded and afterwards they have taken part in a semi-structured qualitative interview based on a Danish dialogical interview guide. The video-observation and interviews were carried out during January 2017 – April 2018. Data has been digitally recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a hermeneutical and pragmatic analysis of language approach.

Preliminary results



- **Listening:** "[she is] a good listener... that I must say... and that is worth it's weight in gold"
- **Understanding:** "I think it is great that they are so attentive to the person... that they take their time to sit down and talk"
- **Communicating:** "you probably tend to think that when you go to see a dietitian, right, then you gonna get bashed over the head [...] but that has not been my experience... there has been added some good things to what I am already doing... and that makes me feel like this is something I can easily handle because it is not a lot of huge changes to make but rather small changes which I would be able to do easily... so it is very useful"

Conclusions

- Patients and relatives** find it valuable and reassuring to **meet a dietitian who takes time to listen and understand** their situation, **and therefore is better able to help them** with their eating difficulties.
- The **dietitians** find it valuable and applicable to **learn from the research circles and so develop their counselling skills and knowledge**.

References

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