

The illness trajectory experienced by patients having spine fusion surgery

A feeling of being (in)visible

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Abstract PhD Day 2015

The illness trajectory of spine fusion patients. A feeling of being (in)visible

Background

Research shows that being a back patient is associated with great personal cost, and that back patients who undergo so-called spine fusion often experience particularly long and uncoordinated trajectories. The patients describe a feeling of being mistrusted and thrown around in the system. It is the aim of this study to examine how spine fusion patients experience their illness trajectory and hospitalisation.

Methods

The study is based on qualitative interviews, and 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 at an Elective Surgery Centre in a Danish regional hospital.

Results

The results show that experiences related to prolonged contact with the healthcare system and healthcare professionals are often dismissed as irrelevant. It is also evident that spine fusion patients are denied the opportunity to verbalise what it feels like to, for example, be "a person in constant pain" or someone who "holds back" to avoid being an inconvenience. These feelings are internalised as a sense of doubt and powerlessness, resulting in spine fusion patients experiencing that they are "disappearing" as a person; losing their identity.

Conclusion

To conclude, the biomedical perspective obscures spine fusion patients' horizon of meaning, which is existentially rooted in the areas of the lifeworld. This can lead to psychological and social problems, which in turn can result in a compromised sense of identity and a reduced feeling of social belonging.