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Experiences of gynaecological cancer and treatment of female survivors.

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Abstract

Until recently, clinical management of gynaecological cancer focussed almost exclusively on prolonging life. This resulted in improved diagnostic and treatment regimes that increased survival. Unfortunately, this comes at the price of various side effects that can have a vast impact on women's personal and social lives by introducing a variety of challenges and changes that necessitate adjustment. This qualitative study was carried out to gain insight into the challenges faced by women following gynaecological cancer diagnosis, treatment and effects as well as the changes implemented by them as a result of altered circumstances and perceptions. Purposive sampling was used to recruit women diagnosed with gynaecological cancer and who had undergone various treatments. Interviews revealed a range of shared experiences of the gynaecological cancer and highlighted the importance women placed on identity re-evaluation and reconstruction. Four themes emerged from the data: women's sense of female identity following gynaecological cancer treatment, threats to the identity experienced, protection mechanisms adopted by women to protect the self or identity as well as reconstruction of a new identity as a result of changed circumstances that was induced by cancer. While some of the findings were consistent with results of previous research conducted on identity re-evaluation and reconstruction of cancer survivors, it became clear that women with gynaecological cancer have to endure many unique challenges to their identity that needs to be addressed in future to lessen suffering endured.

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