

## FEATURE ARTICLE

# Self-Determination and Information Seeking in End-Stage Cancer

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When patients learn that their cancer has recurred after primary treatments or is no longer responding to therapy and no alternative treatment options exist, their motivation to carry on living may be impacted greatly. Using the Self-Determination Theory, this article's reflective analysis explores the unique situation of a woman with end-stage cancer and her continuous motivation to seek information about her illness. Information was gathered during clinical observations and informal conversations. The analysis showed how the patient sought information about her illness, how she manifested motivation, and how the hospital's social environment influenced her behavior. To understand the experience of being confronted with a terminal illness, the following issues are identified: expansion of awareness, life-facing knowledge contradictions, being open-minded and an active explorer of information sources, medical truth, and professional attitudes toward patients' informational needs. Nurses must understand patients' reasons for self-determination when facing illness uncertainty. Reflecting on such situations will strengthen nursing practice.

In the current paradigm of chronic illness, individuals are expected to become self-managers, a role involving self-care, agency, independence, autonomy, competence, and responsibility (World Health Organization, 1993). Motivation usually is seen as a positive attribute, generating an active outcome (Deci, 1996). Among patients with end-stage cancer, motivation to seek in-depth information, including possibilities of wellness and hope, remains only partially understood.

## Questions From a Clinical Observation

A woman in her 70s with end-stage cancer who was motivated to seek information about treatment options when further therapies were not possible is the subject of this article. Throughout the clinical observations, the following questions emerged.

- Why does an individual with advanced end-stage cancer continue seeking cancer-related information?
- How does such a woman manifest her motivation to seek information?
- How does the hospital's social environment influence such information seeking?

## Self-Management in Cancer Experiences

The management of pain, immobility, and fatigue among others is required before individuals can engage in self-care for a chronic illness (Germino, 2006). Once symptoms are

### At a Glance

- ◆ Personal motivation to maintain autonomy when dealing with a diagnosis of end-stage cancer may not be expected in most individuals.
- ◆ Oncology nurses must understand the role of personal motivation and work alongside individuals and support their requests for information in relation to their health status.
- ◆ Patients are the experts of their experience, and they require information to make informed decisions about treatment and options that would work best for them, on an individual basis.

controlled and no longer are distressing, individuals may be motivated to begin seeking information about procedures, tests, prognoses, functional alterations, self-management, and life-threatening situations. To effectively manage illness-related

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