

Existential Suffering in the Daily Lives of Those Living with Palliative Care Needs Arising from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

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Abstract : Statement of the problem: There are an estimated 328 million cases of COPD worldwide. It is likely to become the third biggest cause of death by 2030. The impact of living with palliative care needs arising from COPD disrupts an individual's existential situation. Understandings of individuals' existential situations within COPD are limited within the research literature and are rarely addressed within clinical practice, yet existential suffering has been linked to poor health-related quality of life for those living with other chronic conditions. The purpose of this integrative review is to provide a synthesis of existing evidence on existential suffering for those living with palliative care needs arising from COPD. Methods: This is an integrative review undertaken in accordance with PRISMA guidelines. Nine electronic databases were searched from April 2019 to January 2021. Thirty-five empirical research papers of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, alongside systematic literature reviews, were included. Data analysis was undertaken using an integrative thematic analysis approach. Findings: Identified themes of existential suffering when living with palliative care needs arising from COPD are as follows: Liminality, Lamented Life, Loss of Personal Liberty, Life Meaning and Existential isolation. The absence of life meaning and purpose was of most importance to patients. Conclusion and Significance: This integrative review provides a synthesis of international evidence upon the presence of existential suffering. It is present and of significant impact within the daily lives of those living with palliative care needs arising from COPD. The absence of life meaning has the most significant impact, requiring further exploration of both its physical and psychological impact. Rediscovery of life meaning diminishes feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness in daily life and facilitates feelings of inner peace. For those with COPD living with such a relentless symptom burden, a positive existential situation is desirable.

Keywords : palliative care, COPD, existential suffering, end of life care

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