THE MEANING OF LIVING WITH MALODOROUS EXUDING ULCERS

Elisabeth Lindahl, Astrid Norberg, Anna Söderberg

Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

Aim: This study illuminates the meaning of living with malodorous exuding ulcers.

Methods: Nine patients with various diagnoses were interviewed. As the aim was to illuminate meaning a phenomenological hermeneutic method was used to interpret the transcribed interviews. This method involves examining the text very systematically and thoroughly through a dialectic movement between explanation and understanding.

Results: Two processes were identified: ‘being struck down’-themes: feeling dirty, being trapped, losing confidence, losing hope, becoming frustrated and protecting oneself; and ‘finding consolation’- themes: experiencing kinship, encountering genuineness and gaining control.

The meaning of living with malodorous exuding ulcers can be understood as being trapped in a debilitating process that slowly strikes one down. There is a longing for purity and wholeness, and for one’s life to improve. When people living with malodorous, exuding ulcers encounter genuineness, and feel loved, regarded and respected as fully human despite their ulcers, they feel purified. They feel restored, and fully human, as the contaminated body no longer contaminates their self-image and self-esteem. It becomes possible for them to regain control and see life beyond their ulcers.

Discussion: Nurses cannot make smell or ulcers disappear but they can contribute significantly to improve the patients’ life. Finding consolation makes patients feel purified despite their contaminated body. This study points to the importance of seeing the human being beyond the ulcer and considering not only the body but the whole person.