

Experiences and perspectives of patients with advanced cancer regarding work resumption and work retention: a qualitative interview study

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INTRODUCTION

- About **half of the patients** with advanced cancer is of **working age**.
- Improvements in medical care are **enabling patients with advanced cancer to live longer** and **increasing their possibilities of work participation**.
- **Little is known** about the experiences of patients with advanced cancer who want to return to work or stay employed.

METHODS

- **Semi-structured interviews (n = 15)** were conducted with patients with advanced cancer who were **currently back in paid employment** or had the **intention** to return to work.
- Participants were **recruited** through clinicians, patient organizations and social media.
- Interviews were **transcribed** and **thematically analyzed**.

OBJECTIVE: To explore the perceptions of patients with advanced cancer regarding work resumption and work retention and the barriers and facilitators they may experience.

Paid employment is an important topic in the lives of patients with advanced cancer

“It is necessary to hold on to things that belong to your life and work is part of that. It prevents you from getting lost and keeps you going. I experienced this very strongly when it turned out that I had metastasized cancer.”

“In the beginning, it was like, if you have lung cancer stage 4, you’re not supposed to work anymore and that was emphasized by my colleagues, which I found quite difficult.”



RESULTS

Characteristics	(n = 15)
Gender, n	
• Male	2
• Female	13
Age, mean (range)	52 (41-64)
Primary cancer site, n	
• Breast	7
• Cervical	3
• Other	5
Current employment status, n	
• Sick leave at current employer	5
• Working	8
• Job seeking	2

1. Holding on to normalcy

- Work became more meaningful, because it enabled patients to contribute to society instead of feeling rejected by it.

2. High understanding, divergent expectations

- Employers showed high understanding during sick leave, but they did not expect their employee to return to work.
- Work ability was viewed with skepticism.

3. Social discomfort calls for patient-initiated alignment

- Discomfort was present among colleagues.
- Patients were required to initiate and align all communication.

4. Laws and regulations require patient empowerment

- Applying for a job was difficult due to stigma.
- Being proactive / inner determination, to go against all expectations, was important.

MAIN IMPLICATIONS

Findings might **correct erroneous preconceptions** about the work intention of patients with advanced cancer. **Awareness** should be created on their abilities and clinicians should be involved in work-related issues during palliative cancer care.

CONCLUSION

Social discomfort of the environment regarding advanced cancer patients' wish to work necessitates patient-initiated communication. Non-tailored work-related legislation requires a proactive attitude.

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