ABSTRACT

Communication and providing information to individuals in need of cancer care is, in my opinion, one of the foundations on which nursing is based. It is essential to both the process and outcome of cancer care. Many people assume that the diagnosis of cancer heralds very unpleasant treatments followed by a universally gloomy outcome. This is a socially constructed interpretation around the word cancer (Fallowfield and Jenkins, 1999).

Seeking information is one strategy that many people use to help them cope with the challenge that cancer brings. It is a way of coping with the practical aspects of the illness and its treatments and can help to manage any fears and anxieties experienced. Abma (2002) states that one way of recognising the importance individuals diagnosed with cancer have in the development of health care is by ‘giving them space/voice’ in the academic setting.

My study was a hermeneutic study underpinned by Gadamer’s philosophy of fusion of horizons in which individuals' experiences with cancer and communication with health care providers during their chemotherapy treatment have been interpreted using narrative analysis. The purpose of my study was to gain a new and deeper understanding of experiences from individuals with cancer and from communication with health care providers during the chemotherapy period. I present six different narratives of individuals with cancer and I was committed to letting the narratives of my dialogue partners speak for themselves. Though I asked my dialogue partners to concentrate on their experiences of communication with health care providers during the chemotherapy period, five of them started from the beginning of experiencing symptoms. For all of them treatment was successful and they told of looking to the future. The seventh narrative, my reflective stance and development of self through the dialogue process, came to light along with my interpretation of significant aspects of the six narratives in terms of communication.

I began to realize how hermeneutic research is truly a learning process, how understanding is informed by writing and that voicing myself by reflecting on the process of learning rather than stating what I knew. I realised that my reflective journey in finding a voice through my study was parallel to my dialogue partners’ journey. Our texts were running parallel in a communicative narrative where two waves emerged:

- Regaining a Stance by Holding on to Personhood
- Collaboration

The enlightening thing was that not only did I interpret theses aspects from my dialogue partners’ narratives, but that they were also in accordance with the waves in my own reflective narrative in gaining a voice in the academic world and finding out that true communication involves collaboration between all parties, whether in a research process or within the health care environment, built on dignity, mutual respect, trust and care. It came to my understanding that in the communication trajectory the core concern is personhood and collaboration.

There were certain aspects from the narratives which I draw out as significant in my study in terms of communication. They were all important issues, either enhancing or diminishing personhood. These aspects were: Stigma; A Person or a Case; Listening; Respect and Trust; Hope; Environmental Atmosphere and Attitude; Collaboration and Cure – Care: Antitheses or Parallel Meanings.