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Outcomes of Pulmonary Rehabilitation valued by patients with COPD – patients' perspectives

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Aim: Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is fundamental for the management of patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) as it improves symptoms, exercise tolerance and health-related quality of life. Awareness for the need of including patients' perspectives to improve healthcare has been increasing, however, the outcomes of PR most valued by patients have been little investigated. This study aimed to explore patients' perspectives about outcomes of PR.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The experience in participating and the positive and negative effects of PR, were explored in patients with stable COPD. 7 patients (100% males, 69.4±2.3 years, FEV₁ 53.2±16.7%) that participated in a 12-week community-based PR program were recruited. Qualitative data were organized into themes and categories using NVivo software. Percentages were used for the frequency that patients reported each theme or category.

Results: 7 themes emerged from the analysis - health-related physical fitness and functional capacity; vital signs, symptoms and sleep; mood and motivation; feeling fulfilled; education; healthy behaviours and financial constraints. The most reported themes as being meaningful outcomes of PR were health-related physical fitness and functional capacity (100%), vital signs, symptoms and sleep (100%), and mood and motivation (71%). Whilst most themes were seen as positive, patients recognized financial constraints (57%) as a negative effect, which influenced their decision to maintain adherence to PR programs. The most valued categories were taking control over dyspnoea (100%), improving performance in daily-life activities (86%), reducing tiredness (86%) and reducing anxiety and fear (86%). Furthermore, patients showed concern about adopting healthy habits, particularly smoking cessation (86%), recognizing it as a priority for the management of the disease.

Conclusion: This study suggests that special attention should be paid to functional activities, fatigue, fear and financial constraints, since they are highly meaningful to patients with COPD and yet commonly underestimated in PR programs.

Declaration of Interest

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