

The illusion of patient-centred rehabilitation in palliative care.

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Abstract:

In this session, I will draw on stories told by people with metastatic spinal cord compression secondary to cancer to illustrate the way in which a sense of self as resourceful, competent and relevant is vital to well-being and quality of life. Maintaining such an identity in the face of evidence to the contrary (deteriorating function, reduced social participation and increasing dependence on others) can be challenging. We will start by tracing the features of stories in general – plot, characterisation, and narration – to see how these encourage an ‘audience’ to ‘read’ it in a particular way. Then, using techniques in narrative analysis (specifically, speech act theory), I will show how health professionals make certain assumptions and decisions on the basis of the way that they hear and process the stories that patients tell. I will suggest that while patient-centredness is held up to be an ideal in rehabilitation, its rhetoric can, at times, compromise patients' ability to live as fulfilled a life as possible.