

**Bittersweet living life in the face of loss: parenteral nutrition in ovarian cancer patients in bowel obstruction.**

**Author(s):** Sowerbutts AM<sup>\*</sup>, Lal S, Clamp A, Jayson G, Raftery AM, Todd C, Hardy L, Sremanakova J, Sutton E, Burden S.

**Institution:** University of Manchester (School of Health Sciences)

**Job title:** Research Associate

**Email address:** annemarie.sowerbutts@manchester.ac.uk

**Background/objectives:** Malignant bowel obstruction is a complication of advanced ovarian cancer and these patients may receive home parenteral nutrition (PN). This study investigated women's experiences on home PN as there is limited research in this area.

**Methods:** Ninety-three longitudinal in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women with ovarian cancer and inoperable bowel obstruction receiving PN, their lay-carers and healthcare professionals (HCP). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically influenced by the techniques of Van Manen<sup>1</sup>.

**Results:** Patients considered the benefit of having PN, as allowing them to live life with a semblance of normality in their own environment with their family and for many it facilitated reaching specific goals. However, the treatment came with losses which could be underplayed by HCP. These included erosions of normality by affecting activities of daily living, loss of physical freedom due to being attached to tubes and heavy PN bags and dealing with the bureaucracy relating to PN. Carers coped but emotionally were often left in a vulnerable state.

**Implications:** Patients and carers recognised the treatment as a life line and were grateful for it. However this benefit came with losses and HCP need to be realistic about these and aware of carer needs. Nevertheless, patients are prepared to suffer losses in order to continue living.

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<sup>1</sup> Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Ont.: Althouse Press.