

# Experiences of Patients With Laryngectomies As They Reintegrate Into Their Communities

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## INTRODUCTION

Head and neck cancers have been described as the most emotionally traumatic of all cancers. Psychosocial problems may not become apparent until after discharge from the hospital. Little has been studied or published regarding patients experiences during this challenging transition period after discharge, as they reintegrate into their communities.

## AIMS

The purposes of this qualitative study are to describe patient's perceptions and experiences as they reintegrate into the community following laryngectomy surgery and identify their perceived supports and barriers for this often silent, marginalized population.

## METHODS AND SAMPLE

Thorne's (1997) qualitative interpretive description method will be used to guide the study. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit nine participants from a two large urban hospitals. In-depth, audiotaped interviews were conducted with nine participants, 6 to 12 months following surgery. Giorgi's analytical technique was used for analysis. Following data analysis, study findings were shared with participants to verify that themes were reflective of the experience of the participants.

## RESULTS

Enveloped under an overarching theme of a "Constant Accommodation to Life with a Laryngectomy" were three main themes: 1) Impact of Cancer Diagnosis, 2) Coping with Illness: Trying to Live Life like Before, and 3) Transitions in Recovery. Subthemes further illuminated the constant accommodation participants had to make following diagnosis of recurrence, surgery, and returning home.

## FINDINGS

### CONSTANT ACCOMMODATION TO LIFE WITH LARYNGECTOMY

IMPACT OF CANCER DIAGNOSIS	COPING WITH ILLNESS TRYING TO LIVE LIFE LIKE BEFORE	TRANSITIONS IN RECOVERY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No choice, surgery or death</li> <li>Fear of recurrence</li> <li>Loss of what was</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't give up</li> <li>Can overcome</li> <li>Need empathetic understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grief</li> <li>Home — familiar</li> <li>Followed by renewed self reliance and independence</li> <li>Knowing how to give self care</li> <li>Realizing lack of resources in community</li> <li>Work/early retirement</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Altered airway communication</li> <li>Eating</li> <li>Body image</li> <li>Stigma/shame</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer support</li> <li>Internet/skype</li> </ul>	

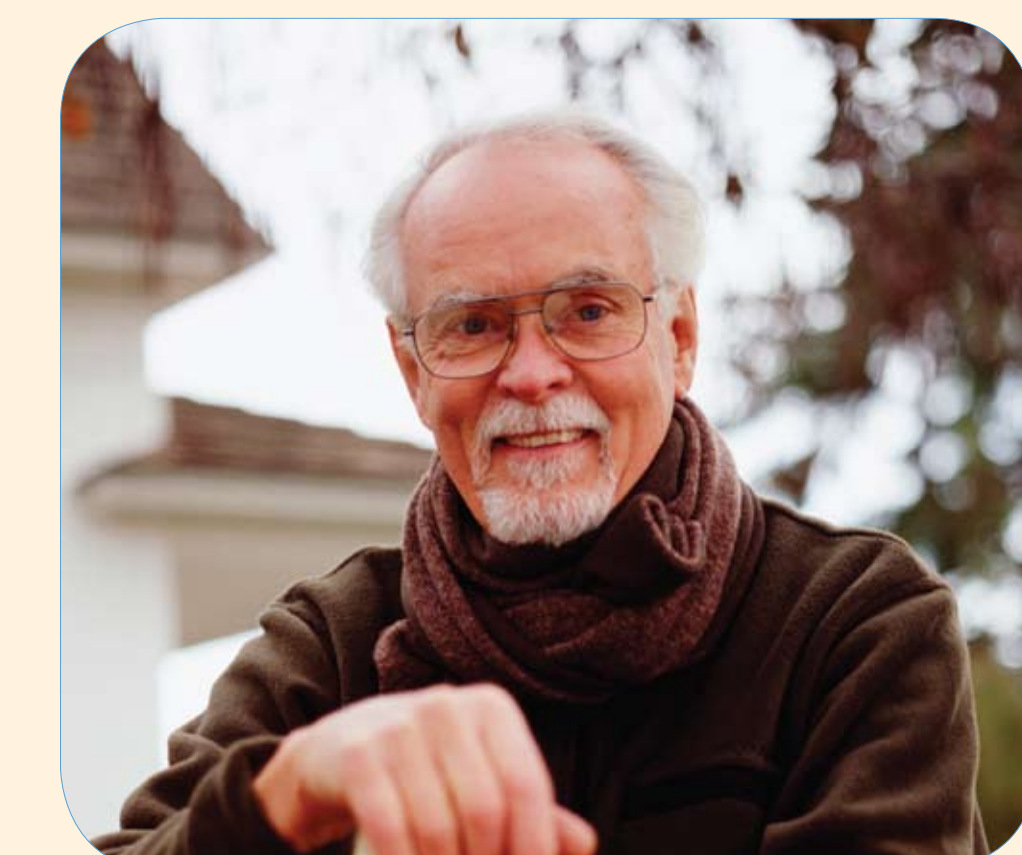
## DISCUSSION

- Patients face many obstacles in their journey to transition and adapt to their life with a laryngectomy
- Family involvement and support is critical for the success of these patients upon returning home. They find comfort in the familiar surroundings of home with family
- It must be noted that community health care support for these patients is a challenge due to the rare nature of this cancer
- Patients in small communities can feel very isolated and alone when they are the only patient with these challenges
- Web based support groups could be very successful as these patients do not feel up to travelling into larger centres and trying to speak in a larger group
- Promoting the use of technology is a great assistance to patients with laryngectomies. Instant messaging, email, web based support groups, and video messaging can contribute to a great improvement in communication and engagement for this population

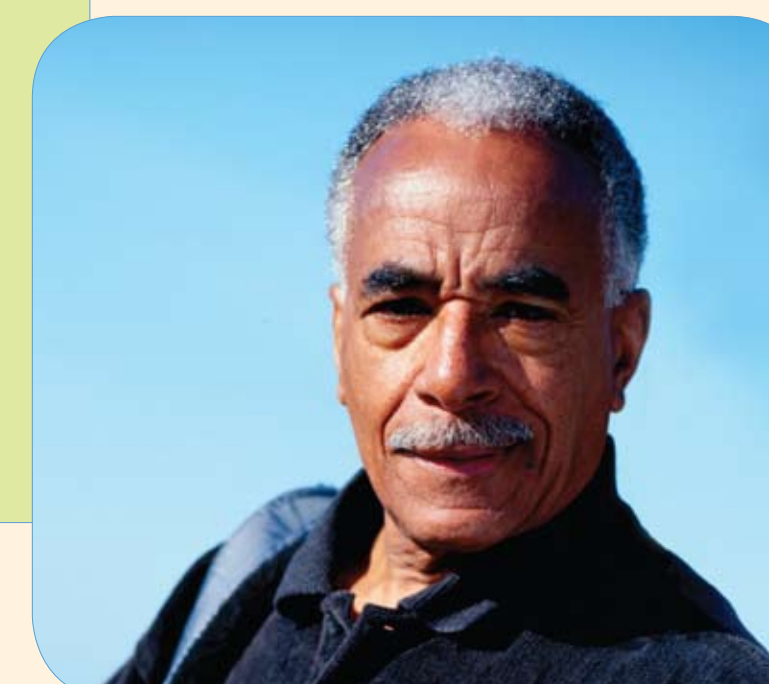
"I think at the time, at the beginning, the most difficult thing for me was eating...Eating was very hard, adjusting, or trying to eat solids...I have to be very careful eating, I keep biting myself due to the swelling."



"At the beginning, everybody looked at me like I was a person from another planet or something like that, everybody."



"But there are other people out there, and other groups, that are willing to help. There are over 100,000 of us out there. Go on WebWhispers.org."



"But it feels very painful. I'm mentally alive and I cannot speak, not exactly the way that I would like to, but I feel I can't talk. So, again, the changes that are most significant to me are at work."

The photos used on this poster are stock images and not actual patients.