A diagnosis of colorectal cancer and its ensuing treatment can have a devastating impact on a person’s quality of life. Significant gaps exist in the understanding of the disease’s impact, particularly in its advanced state, from the perspective of patients, including the concerns, benefits, challenges, and burdens associated with diagnosis and treatment. Patient participants struggled with balancing living with the illness while attempting to rescue and protect some semblance of their routine lives.

Scant research exists on the impact of colorectal cancer for newly diagnosed patients with advanced disease. This article reports on a descriptive, qualitative study of 14 patients newly diagnosed with advanced colorectal cancer.

Literature Review

A diagnosis of colorectal cancer and its ensuing treatment can have a devastating impact on a person’s quality of life (QOL). A number of studies have been completed since the 1970s to provide research evidence on QOL and health-related QOL (HRQOL) (Anderson & Palmer, 1998; Klemm, Miller, & Fernsler, 2000; Nordin & Glimelius, 1997; Ramsey et al., 2000; Sahay, Gray, & Fitch, 2000; Sprangers, te Velde, Aaron, & Taal, 1993; Williams & Johnston, 1983).

Colorectal carcinoma is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer among men and women in the United States and the second most common cause of cancer death (American Cancer Society, 2005). According to current estimates, colorectal cancer will develop in about 6% of people over their life span. When men and women are considered separately, colorectal cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer death in each gender (American Cancer Society).