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How do young people find out about their parent's cancer diagnosis: A phenomenological study

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Abstract

Aim

Grief and its many manifestations can irrevocably change family life and the multiple relationships within. Informed by this, one is led to consider the extent an adult nurse provides a family focus to cancer care. It arguably remains wanting, particularly in adult healthcare environments where "family" can still infer "spouse" and the needs of children and young people at home may as a result go unrecognized. Little attention has been paid to what or how young people should be told about their parent's cancer diagnosis, but from the limited research that has been undertaken, parents are seeking help with this aspect of communication.

Methods

An interpretative phenomenological approach was used to explore the research question: How do young people experience learning about their parent's cancer diagnosis? This was a single centre study recruiting seven participants, aged 14–18 years, which included two sets of siblings. Participants were interviewed on one occasion only.

## Results

The interview data revealed six dimensions of the young person's experience of learning about a parental diagnosis: first hearing about a parent's diagnosis; vulnerability of self and others, communication within the family, feeling supported in experience, experience and support of school, experience and support of hospital. Young people overwhelmingly advocate honesty and openness in family communication about cancer.

## Conclusions

Our participants demonstrated strength and resourcefulness in adapting to their parent's cancer. Meaning making was central to our study's intent and still today it offers a perspective of the diagnosis period that has not been fully explored in the extant literature.



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## Keywords

Parental cancer diagnosis; Interpretative phenomenological analysis; Young people; Diagnosis period; Impact of cancer

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