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Husbands Living with Women on Dialysis: Embracing Their Transformed Life

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the adjustment process of husbands living with women on dialysis. Using Glaser's (1978) grounded theory methodology, data were collected from 18 husbands through semi-structured face-to-face or telephone tape-recorded interviews. In using the constant comparative method of data analysis, the most central issue for these husbands was dealing with multiple changes imposed by the demands and impact of kidney failure and its treatment regimens on various dimensions of their lives. The changes impacted roles and responsibilities at home and work, social and recreational activities, finances, relationships with their spouse and others, home environment, daily routines, and future plans, as well as health and/or sleep patterns. Although the impact of these changes created many hardships for husbands, witnessing their wives' suffering was more distressing. In response, these men involved themselves in supporting their wives and engaging in the basic social process of embracing their transformed life. The four stages of embracing a transformed life are becoming aware, involving themselves, centering life on their wives, and striving to achieve balance. The marital relationship, the women's health status, as well as the presence of informal support and formal support are conditions which significantly influenced the process. The theory of embracing a transformed life provides a framework for understanding and explaining the complex interplay of strategies undertaken by these husbands to respond to, adjust to, and integrate changes in their daily and future lives. Moreover, the focus on husbands living with women on dialysis contributes towards closing an existing gap in knowledge and the findings underscore the husbands' abilities to learn and carry out complex roles, responsibilities, and routines that require sophisticated observation, decision making, and technical and problem-solving skills. The discrete stages of the theory guide nurses to better understand the various changes dialysis-caregivers may experience during different phases of the patients' illness trajectory and to implement supportive care to enhance their adjustment and sustain their efforts.

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