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Perspectives of people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD): A qualitative study of the outcomes and benefits of pulmonary rehabilitation for everyday life

There is consistent support for pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) as an effective intervention in the management of the symptoms and improving quality of life (QOL) in people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (Lacasse et al, 2005). Whether some or all benefits of PR are maintained beyond the point of rehabilitation is unclear. By conducting qualitative research that explores the perspective of individuals about their experience of PR this may also allow factors influencing improvements in QOL and the maintenance of effect to be better understood. Method: 6 participants with a clinical diagnosis of COPD who had undergone a comprehensive PR program six to eighteen months prior to the study participated in two semi structured interviews. Data analysis was guided by qualitative principles of analysis throughout the research process, immersion in the data, and in depth reading using an iterative approach.

Results: The findings of this study revealed individuals with COPD experienced benefits from participating in PR including (a) increased knowledge; (b) increased feelings of control over symptoms; (c) a changed perception of themselves and disease, and (d) increased activity tolerance. Factors participants felt that contributed to benefits were being in a group environment, the level of interaction with health professionals involved in PR, and participants’ own intrinsic factors. Over time, maintenance of outcomes varied though many positive outcomes had persisted. Conclusion: For clinicians who run PR, findings suggest the importance of interacting with clients and increasing collaborative reasoning to achieve results important to individual clients. Findings also suggest that including a subjective interview with traditional quantitative measures may allow a greater understanding of how the effects of PR are maintained over time for individuals.