BEING DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER: THE EXPERIENCES OF PATIENTS WITH NON-HODGKIN’S LYMPHOMA
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AIM
To explore the lived experiences of patients on receiving a diagnosis of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma (NHL).

BACKGROUND
Patients with NHL are often diagnosed when at an advanced stage. This may occur as there are no screening programs which detect NHL. Moreover, cancers such as lymphomas receive less media coverage and thus, patients receive less exposure to information relating to this type of cancer. This may have an impact on delays in help-seeking in patients with NHL, who often attribute their influenza-like symptoms to common illnesses, stress or busy roles rather than to a diagnosis of NHL. Consequently, receiving an unexpected diagnosis of NHL may pose a psychosocial challenge to the patient.

DESIGN
An exploratory qualitative phenomenological design was used.

METHODS
Six adult patients diagnosed with NHL were recruited and participated in two semi-structured interviews at different time points. Transcribed texts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

RESULTS
Three main themes emerged:

EMOTIONAL REACTION TO THE DIAGNOSIS
- Some of the participants expressed disbelief at being diagnosed with NHL because they could not associate the experiencing of mild symptoms with a serious illness such as cancer.
- A sense of relief was expressed by one participant, who could now provide a label to the pain experienced.

STRUGGLING WITH A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING
- Some of the participants expressed shock as they had never heard about NHL and thus, had no understanding about it.
- Some of the participants had to seek information about NHL on the internet, suggesting that there was a lack of informational support from health care professionals.

SEARCHING THROUGH PAST EXPERIENCES
- Some of the participants recounted past experiences of cancers which could have further increased their psychological distress at the time of their cancer diagnosis.

CONCLUSIONS
The present study highlights the responses of patients with NHL on receiving a diagnosis. These responses are influenced by their knowledge about the illness, type of symptoms experienced and their own personal circumstances.

WHAT DOES THIS PAPER ADD TO THE WIDER GLOBAL CLINICAL COMMUNITY?
- Patients with NHL respond in various ways to the news of a cancer diagnosis.
- There is a lack of public awareness about NHL. Therefore, health care professionals have to provide information to patients to decrease the misconceptions that exist about this type of cancer.
- Psychological support should be made available to patients with NHL at the time of diagnosis.
- There is a lack of awareness about NHL among primary health care professionals. This can be tackled by providing further education to primary health care professionals about NHL and haematological cancers in general.