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Experiences of living kidney donors during the donation process – a prospective qualitative study

Background

Kidney transplantation is considered the best choice of treatment for patients with end-stage renal disease. The shortage of organs from deceased donors has led to an increasing number of living kidney donors. Furthermore, immunological developments have made it possible to perform kidney transplantation despite preformed antibodies against the donor organ. This has led to a broader recruitment base of living donors resulting in new variations in, and types of, relations between recipient and donor.

Aim

To investigate donors' experiences of donation and their recovery period in the first three months after donation.

Method

The study has a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach. As complementary methods open interviews and participant observation were conducted in the period before, during and after the donation process. Data was interpreted and discussed in accordance with Ricoeur's text interpretation theory on three levels: naïve reading, structural analysis and critical interpretation and discussion.

Eighteen potential donors over the age of 18 were included.

Results

The donation process was experienced as an 'expedition', including preparations, the operation, recovery and everyday life. Positive feelings were impossible to describe; however health troubles and vulnerability were evident. A closer relationship and a need to follow the recipient's progress implied that patient and donor felt they were a part of each other. Support from relatives was important but could also be a burden.

Conclusion

The kidney donation process is experienced as like being on an expedition, involving positive feelings, vulnerability, a closer patient-donor relationship and challenges around family relationships. It is essential that nurses are cognizant of the complexity of the situation and focus on the impact of the process, to support and facilitate donors' needs.