Informal and Incidental Learning with Patients Who Use Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis

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Adults learn continuously from the complex interplay of experiences in their day-to-day lives. This article reports on qualitative research conducted with 8 individuals with a diagnosis of end stage renal disease (ESRD) (6 women, 2 men) who were using continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis (CAPD). Interviews with each individual in his or her home focused on how the participants made sense and learned from their experiences. The authors examined the data to determine the informal and incidental learning in the patients’ homes, as well as the conditions that supported or limited this learning. Learning themes included understanding of medical and professional language, trusting their own experience, and living on the border of life and death. Barriers to learning included a diminished sense of personhood and the low literacy level of participants. Aspects of informal and incidental learning theory (Watkins & Marsick, 1992) are used to examine the informal learning that occurred. The authors acknowledge the adult learning implications and urge nurses to examine informal learning more closely.

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