Abstract:
Introduction: Children and adolescents with chronic illness develop their understanding and personal meaning of chronic illness from their own experiences, as well as from parents, families, and healthcare providers. However, with their limited cognitive ability, children’s perceptions may be discordant from reality. Further, children manage their perceptions through selective disclosure and concealment to minimize differences from peers. Therefore, the purpose is to explore the perceptions, understanding, and personal meaning of chronic illness to children and adolescents with Cystic Fibrosis (CF) by synthesizing the results of three grounded theory studies.

Method(s): Three grounded theory studies of children and adolescents with CF were used to explore and synthesize perceptions and misconstructions about chronic illness. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological developmental framework was used to guide this research. A purposeful sample of 55 children and adolescents (6 to 22 years) with CF was obtained from three studies; theoretical saturation was achieved. In-depth interviews were used to explore perceptions and personal meaning of chronic illness. Strategies of reflection and paraphrasing were used to clarify meaning, confirm accuracy, and credibility. Constant-comparative method with open and axial coding was used to identify core categories, dimensions, and relationships.

Results: Children and adolescents characterized their perceptions of CF over time as Discovering a Different Life Course by: (a) discovering a sense of difference (school-age children), (b) reducing a sense of difference (early-to-middle adolescence), and (c) discovering the chronic illness course (late adolescence). These impressions revealed hidden truths,
discordant views, and multiple realities (including expectation of early death), that were embedded in perceptions about growing up with chronic illness. Moreover, the social consequences of chronic illness in their everyday lives lead to problems with peer relationships.

**Discussion & Conclusions:** Understanding how children and adolescents perceive their chronic illness is critical for developing interventions to improve adherence to treatment, as well as address the social consequences of chronic illness and improve their quality of life.

**Abstract History:**
This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.

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