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Patients' goal, resources and perceived hindrances for future change - a qualitative study of patients' reflections at hospital discharge after myocardial infarction

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Background: Patients undergoing a myocardial infarction (MI) may find adherence to lifestyle advice and medication challenging. Motivational factors or barriers for these changes are crucial. However, empirical evidence on patient’s ability to assess lifestyle changes at the time of discharge is limited.

Aim: The aim of this study was therefore to explore MI patient’s goals, resources and perceived hindrances for future change at the time of hospital discharge.

Methods: We conducted a qualitative interview study with a purposive sample of twenty MI patients, of them eight women, in a department of heart disease at a university hospital in Norway. All interviews were undertaken prior to hospital discharge, transcribed verbatim and analyzed with qualitative content analysis.

Findings: Three themes revealed that patients’ experience of MI were complex and divergent at the time of discharge. There were patients who were motivated for both life-style changes and to chart a new direction for the future life, implicating a change of life perspective. Patients who experienced complication during hospital stay or had a complicated life situation felt both discouraged and anxious, and just wanted to keep going. Commonly, patients were struggling to understand the context of living with MI, managing symptoms and understanding the precipitating causes of their illness.

Conclusion and implications: This study reveals the need for a different approach to MI patients at the time of discharge. Person-centered care where personal narratives are focused may chart a more individualized guidance to prepare MI patients to cope with every day challenges after discharge.