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Living at a residency away from home during radiotherapy as narrated by 52 patients with breast cancer: a cage of safety and discomfort.

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Abstract: In the Nordic countries many patients with cancer conclude their treatment with 5-6 weeks of radiotherapy while staying at a residency far away from home. The experience of this stay, from a rehabilitation perspective, has not previously been studied.

Fifty-two women with breast cancer were followed with repeated thematic interviews from diagnosis up to 2 years.

The majority of women saw both pros and cons with their stay, and overall the stay could be described as "A cage of safety and discomfort". Pros included "Safety", "Closeness and learning", and "Feeling like being on holiday", while cons included "An intruding self-image", "Isolation and increased vulnerability", and "A loss of function". Some patients supported their own rehabilitation by socializing with their "fellow sisters", while others isolated themselves and mainly found it burdensome to be there.

The residence becomes an interactional field with the potential to facilitate patients in resuming a new everyday life. The women who do not interact with others and/or who are stuck with feelings of anxiety should be offered the opportunity to take part in a group exclusively for "fellow sisters" in a similar situation. Implications for Rehabilitation Staying in accommodations together with other patients receiving daily radiotherapy for cancer for 5-6 weeks lends itself to personal interactions with a rehabilitative impact. Some patients take advantage of this possibility, which might facilitate the integration of the cancer experience into a new self-image. To some more vulnerable patients the stay at the patient hotel is burdensome, and these patients represent a target group for staff interventions aiming to facilitate their stay and their resumption of a new everyday life. A suggestion is that the specialist nurses meet with every patient after about a week in order to identify women who would benefit from psychosocial interventions.

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