

Understanding Q Fever Patient Experience With Illness And Diagnosis

Tabita Tan¹

Anke Wiethoelter² and Jane Heller¹

¹ Charles Sturt University

² University of Melbourne

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Q fever is an underestimated zoonotic disease with serious human health implications. Patient experiences were explored to characterise the impact of the illness on quality of life, pathway to diagnosis and satisfaction with health care.

An online survey was conducted of self-reported Q fever cases, and follow-up interviews were selected from consenting survey participants to represent various experiences with diagnosis and severity of illness. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, and thematic analysis was performed on qualitative data.

Quality of life was severely impacted in 74% of patients with many requiring hospitalisation (50%) and time off work or school (87%). While some participants reported being unwell for over 11 years, most seem to recover within 6 months. Diagnosis was delayed in several participants who had multiple medical visits (up to >10) and were ill for years before obtaining a medical diagnosis. Most diagnoses were made by general practitioners, whose knowledge of Q fever was an important factor for timely diagnosis. Most participants reported exposure to livestock around the time of likely acquisition. Six main themes were derived from the interviews: experience of physical illness, impact on life, emotional experience, managing and surviving Q fever, experience with the medical process and importance of awareness.

Q fever has the potential for severe and life-changing consequences. Obtaining a timely diagnosis can be difficult and patients experienced dissatisfaction with their quality of health care. Adopting a model of patient-centred care and increasing awareness could improve health outcomes and support for Q fever patients.