P27 OLDER ADULTS WITH CANCER—ARE THOSE WHO LIVE ALONE AT THE END OF LIFE A DISADVANTAGED GROUP? A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Health status will help to determine where an older adult can live, but it is also possible that living arrangements may themselves have consequences for the health experience of older adults towards the end of life. This study will explore the relevance to cancer patients irrespective of living arrangements. Those who lived alone had high levels of functioning and quality of life despite poor health status and practical challenges. The desire to maintain independence in all aspects of their lives was a key theme. Loneliness and social isolation were not common, with few differences observed with living arrangements. Companion animals played an important social role and helped to define the daily routine for some participants who lived alone.

Conclusion Living arrangements are easily observed, and a convenient way of defining a population for study. However, the availability of familial and community support may be a more important influence on older people’s end of life experiences. Our findings suggest that the very old living alone with cancer may be a particularly resilient group of people.