

# CHRONIC DISEASE AS PSYCHOSOCIAL DISRUPTION: THE CASE OF END-STAGE KIDNEY FAILURE IN CYPRUS

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This article presents the findings of an ethnographic study of haemodialysis among Greek-Cypriot patients on the island of Cyprus. This article reveals that haemodialysis is experienced differently by people with different social background. The social determinants of perceiving haemodialysis in positive or negative terms are: age, gender, marital and job status. The younger people without families, the younger people who are married with small children, men and those with well paid jobs before the advent of end-stage failure are more likely to experience haemodialysis in negative terms and characterise it as a torture. In general, the greater one's sociality is before end-stage kidney disease, the greater the loss experienced. Conclusively, haemodialysis takes the form of a rite of passage transforming the individual from socially active to socially restricted.

**Key words:** Haemodialysis; organ transplantation, medical sociology/anthropology, Cyprus.

## INTRODUCTION

Organ donation and transplantation are important issues for policymakers in many areas of the world to study and comprehend, and this field has been researched by social sciences in countries such as the United States, Japan, Brazil, Mexico, Germany, and Greece (Sharp 2006; Lock 2002; Joralemon 1995; Schepes-Hughes 2002; Crowley-Matoka 2005; Hogle 1999; Papagaroufali 2002; Fox and Swazey 1992; 1978). The literature points towards an in-depth exploration of the medical treatment of organ failure, and on these grounds this article aims to focus exclusively on the social and procedural nature of the treatment of kidney failure – haemodialysis<sup>2</sup> – as perceived and experienced by Greek-Cypriots on the island of Cyprus. Before presenting the social aspect of haemodialysis let me briefly describe how Greek-Cypriots understand disease, illness and suffering.

Greek-Cypriots are socialized with little knowledge about chronic diseases and, at the onset of a serious disease, they resort to modern biomedicine and to

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<sup>2</sup> In this article I focus exclusively on haemodialysis because it is widely used in Cyprus, while very few patients are under peritoneal dialysis programmes.