Quality of life and health status in interstitial lung diseases

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Purpose of review
The aim of this review is to provide information on the influence of interstitial lung disease on patients’ health status and quality of life, with an emphasis on which aspects might be affected by interstitial lung disease.

Recent findings
The quality of life of sarcoidosis patients with current symptoms and patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis is mainly impaired in the domains of physical health and level of independence. Concerning health status, sarcoidosis patients report reduced physical functioning, especially when they have current symptoms. The health status of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis patients is impaired in almost all aspects. Subjectively assessed dyspnea is related to health status. A relationship between treatment and health status has not been found.

Summary
Results from the existing studies show that both illnesses have a substantial impact on patients’ life. Studies aiming at measuring quality of life or health status in other interstitial lung diseases are scarce or nonexistent.

Keywords
health status, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, interstitial lung disease, quality of life, sarcoidosis

Introduction
The term interstitial lung disease (ILD) embraces a wide variety of diseases that are characterized by inflammation, damage and fibrosis in the acinar regions of the lungs. The most common ILD is sarcoidosis, followed by idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). Other ILDs are, among many others, more or less orphan diseases Wegener’s granulomatosis, pneumoconiosis and bronchiolitis obliterans syndrome.

Sarcoidosis is a disease of young persons with a peak between 20 and 40 years [1,2]. The clinical course of sarcoidosis is highly variable and almost every organ can be involved. The lungs are affected in more than 90% of sarcoidosis patients. Furthermore, the lymph nodes, skin and eyes are frequently involved. Patients with pulmonary sarcoidosis may present with symptoms related directly to the chest such as coughing, dyspnea on exertion, chest pain, chest discomfort and wheezing. Other symptoms such as fever, anorexia, weight loss, general weakness and pain are also related to sarcoidosis [3,4]. A number of studies showed that fatigue is a prominent feature of sarcoidosis [4–7].

IPF, also known as cryptogenic fibrosing alveolitis, is a chronic, progressive, usually fatal disease for which no adequate pharmacotherapy is available. The disease is characterized by inflammation and fibrosis of the alveolar walls [8]. Mostly, corticosteroids are used in combination with azathioprine or cyclophosphamide [9]. Patients with end-stage IPF may be candidates for lung transplantation. The most important symptoms are dyspnea on exertion, fatigue and cough [10–13].

In general, fatigue, dyspnea and cough are the main symptoms in ILD [14]. These symptoms are disabling for the patient and cause an impaired quality of life (QOL). The aim of this review is to provide information on the influence of ILD on patients’ health status and QOL, with an emphasis on which aspects might be affected by ILD.

Methods
A search using the PubMed database was performed with the keywords ‘interstitial lung disease and health status’ and ‘interstitial lung disease and quality of life’. This resulted in 77 and 112 articles, respectively. From these 189 articles, 150 were dropped based on the title or abstract. Reasons for excluding articles were language, i.e. not written in English, German or Dutch (n = 28);
patients were children (n = 10); studies with animals (n = 2); appeared in both searches (n = 35); head and neck Wegener (n = 2); occupational diseases (n = 2); studies concerning ILD as a result of lung cancer (n = 5); studies on lung transplantation (n = 20) or bronchiolitis obliterans syndrome (n = 3); and health status or QOL were not examined by means of questionnaires in one or more ILDs (n = 56).

**Definitions of quality of life and health status**

QOL and health status are two different concepts. Health status refers to the impact of disease on patients’ physical, psychological and social functioning [15], while QOL refers to patients’ perception or evaluation of their functioning [10,15,16]. The WHOQOL Group defined QOL as ‘a person’s perception of their position in life within the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad-ranging concept incorporating, in a complex way, a person’s physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and relationship to salient features of the environment’ [17]. This definition reflects the view that QOL refers to a subjective evaluation of functioning, which is embedded in a cultural, social and environmental context. Furthermore, QOL is a very broad multidimensional concept, going beyond the World Health Organization’s definition of health [18]. Health-related QOL is QOL, but restricted to the physical, mental and social domain. In addition health status measures are subjective in the sense that they are not completed by patients themselves. QOL measures are not only completed by patients, but also ask to evaluate the aspects of QOL (e.g. ‘How satisfied…?’ ‘How bothered…?’) [19]. Thus, health status and (health-related) QOL are distinct concepts [16].

Although most of the studies suggest they measure QOL, they actually assess health status. The studies discussed in the present review are divided into QOL and health status studies.

**Outcome of quality of life studies**

Research on QOL in patients with ILD has existed for less than 10 years, and has only been done among sarcoidosis and IPF patients.

**Sarcoidosis**

The greatest impact on QOL in sarcoidosis, as seen in clinical practice, is caused by rather nonspecific symptoms that are hard to objectify such as fatigue and sleeping disorders [7]. For instance, in one study [6], there appeared to be a number of QOL areas in which patients, particularly those with current symptoms, experienced problems. Surprisingly, sarcoidosis patients either with or without current symptoms suffered from fatigue, sleeping problems and impaired general QOL compared with a healthy control group. Apart from the physical problems mentioned above, patients with current symptoms suffered from impaired QOL with regard to their mobility, working capacity and activities of daily living. Thus, in agreement with other studies [20–22], sarcoidosis has a considerable impact on patients’ QOL, especially in those patients with current symptoms.

In one of these latter studies [22], the QOL of sarcoidosis patients was compared with the QOL of rheumatoid arthritis patients and healthy controls. Compared with the QOL of the healthy controls, the QOL of both patient groups was impaired with regard to the domains of physical health and level of independence. The rheumatoid arthritis group scored even lower than the sarcoidosis group on overall QOL and health. Fatigue, sleep, activities of daily living and working capacity were major problems in sarcoidosis as well as rheumatoid arthritis patients. To date, rheumatoid arthritis patients have demonstrated more problems related to pain and mobility [22]. Another study focusing on gender differences revealed that female patients had a lower QOL, except for the aspect of positive feelings [21].

**Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis**

Two studies [11,23] have been performed establishing QOL in IPF patients. One [23] concerned a semiqualitative study in which 10 patients participated in focus groups about the face validity of a QOL and a health status measure. In addition, patients talked about major issues relating to their QOL. Hobbies/leisure activities, mobility, transport, social relationships, working capacity, energy and doing things slower were aspects relevant to IPF patients’ QOL. Furthermore, compared with the St George Respiratory Questionnaire – a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-specific health status measure – the WHOQOL-100 – a QOL questionnaire, with an additional social support questionnaire – appeared to be preferable [23]. The purpose of the other study was to examine the relationship between QOL, depressive symptoms and breathlessness in IPF patients. Compared with the control group matched for age and sex, QOL in IPF patients was mainly impaired in the domains of physical health and level of independence. A number of relationships were found between pulmonary function tests and QOL. The QOL facet ‘negative feelings’ was highly associated with scores on depression. Subjective breathlessness was related to depressive symptoms and QOL. Moreover, sex and effective/emotional breathlessness predicted overall QOL [11].

**Outcome of health status studies**

With regard to health status, substantially more studies have been performed. Studies mainly focused on sarcoidosis or IPF. One study [24] concerned Wegener’s
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In a study [26] that aimed to assess the relationship between health status and physiological impairment, patients with various ILDs appeared to have a moderately reduced health status. As might be expected, the scores on the applied questionnaires were related to the dyspnea scores of patients and results on their pulmonary function tests.

Sarcoidosis

In two studies [6,27], patients scored higher on cognitive behavior, home management tasks, recreation and hobbies, sleep, social interaction, and work compared with a control group. In the study by Drent et al. [6], sarcoidosis patients suffering from symptoms appeared to be responsible for the differences between the sarcoidosis patients and the control group. Patients with current symptoms reported more depressive symptoms compared with patients without current symptoms. Moreover, whereas the latter subgroup experienced more positive affect, no difference between the two sarcoidosis subgroups were found with regard to negative affect. From the health status aspects, sleep appeared to be associated with depressive symptoms, in general, and depressive cognitions, in particular [6]. Cox et al. [28] found that higher scores on depressive symptoms and perceived stress were related to lower health status scores. In another study [27], the relationship between health status and lung function, as well as respiratory and peripheral muscle function, was examined. Correlations were found between respiratory muscle endurance time and the health status aspects of mobility and body care and movement. In contrast, others found also skeletal muscle weakness in patients with sarcoidosis who complained of fatigue. This weakness was related to reduced health status and exercise intolerance [29]. The radiographic stage was related to cognitive and emotional behavior, home management, and social interaction [27]. With regard to the relationship between pulmonary function tests and dyspnea, and health status, results are inconsistent. Yeager et al. [30] found that lower scores on the spirometric tests and more self-reported dyspnea were related to a diminished health status. In another, smaller study [28] those relationships were not found. Finally, Baughman et al. [31] examined the usefulness of fluticasone in patients with acute symptomatic pulmonary sarcoidosis. No difference was found between the fluticasone ($n = 10$) and the placebo ($n = 11$) group with regard to health status. Oral corticosteroids appeared to be associated with significant complaints, however, while inhaled corticosteroids were well tolerated [31].

Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis

Concerning health status and IPF, a systematic review has been made by Swigris et al. [32]. From the seven studies they included in their review, two [11,23] mainly concerned QOL. These studies have been discussed previously.

Swigris et al. [32] found that, compared with patients with moderately severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, patients with moderately severe IPF had similar scores on the St George Respiratory Questionnaire. IPF patients experienced most problems with the activity domain (St George Respiratory Questionnaire). Although the review showed that patients’ health status was worse in almost every domain in comparison with healthy persons, patients experienced the most impairment in the physical domain. Overall, the correlations between health status and pulmonary function tests were low [32]. Clark et al. [33], however, found that forced vital capacity was predicted by mastery, physical functioning, energy, health perceptions and fewer depressive symptoms. This study had a high nonresponse rate and a substantial number of patients also suffered from rheumatoid arthritis. A study [34] examining the relationship between health status and dyspnea scales found substantial to high correlations. Although the authors concluded that dyspnea scales can be used as health status measures, the common variance only exceeded 50% with regard to physical functioning. This percentage was much lower for associations between dyspnea and psychological and social functioning [34]. Others concluded that dyspnea scales and the St George Respiratory Questionnaire, and not the Quality of Well-being questionnaire, are useful tools for measuring health status in IPF patients; however, this conclusion was solely based on the significant correlations with pulmonary function tests and arterial blood gas measures at rest and during exercise [13]. In a study into nocturnal hypoxemia [33], physical and social functioning, and energy were related to abnormal sleep and lower overnight $S_{a}O_{2}$. With regard to the effect of treatment on health status, no significant difference has been found between patients who received antioxidants or $N$-acetylcysteine [35]; interferon-γ also showed no effect on patients’ health status [9,36]. A study [37]
focusing on factors contributing to patients’ health status revealed that dyspnea was the only predictor.

Discussion
The aim of this review was to provide information on the influence of ILD on patients’ health status and QOL, with an emphasis on which aspects might be affected by ILD.

In the literature, two distinct concepts are examined under the heading QOL: health status, often erroneously called health-related QOL, and QOL. While health status concerns the impact of disease on functioning, (health-related) QOL also reflects patients’ evaluation of their functioning. It is important to make this distinction when planning and performing intervention studies, because health status and QOL measures may produce different results.

Almost all studies concern sarcoidosis or IPF. Results from the existing studies show that both illnesses have a substantial impact on patients’ life. The QOL of sarcoidosis patients with current symptoms and patients with IPF is mainly impaired in the domains of physical health and level of independence. Concerning health status, sarcoidosis patients report reduced physical functioning, especially when they have current symptoms. The health status of IPF patients is impaired in almost all aspects. In sarcoidosis, the major problem is fatigue; in IPF, dyspnea, cough and exercise intolerance are devastating, and have a substantial impact on patients’ lives. In IPF, subjectively assessed dyspnea is related to health status. A relationship between treatment and health status has not been found.

Studies aiming at measuring QOL or health status in other ILDs are scarce or nonexistent. Future studies are needed to obtain information on aspect of life in these patients that are affected by their disease.

Except for the treatment trials that assessed health status, studies are cross-sectional in nature. The major disadvantage of such type of research is that it provides no information on the course of QOL and health status across time, making statements about cause and effect impossible. Follow-up studies focusing on QOL and/or health status are needed.

Conclusion
We have reviewed the influence of ILD on patients’ health status and QOL. There appeared to be relatively few studies examining the health status or QOL of patients with ILD. Except for two studies, existing studies all concerned sarcoidosis and IPF. Research has shown that the health status and QOL of sarcoidosis and IPF patients are impaired. Most of these studies have a cross-sectional design. Concerning other ILDs, there is a paucity of research studying health status and QOL.

References and recommended reading
Papers of particular interest, published within the annual period of review, have been highlighted as:
- of special interest
- of outstanding interest

Additional references related to this topic can also be found in the Current World Literature section in this issue (p. 375).


30 Yeager H, Rossman MD, Baughman RP, et al., ACCESS Research Group. Pulmonary and psychosocial findings at enrollment in the ACCESS study. Sarcoidosis Vas Diffuse Lung Dis 2005; 22:147–153. Lung involvement and the association of demographic and psychosocial factors with respiratory health were examined in 736 persons with sarcoidosis. Impaired spirometry and greater dyspnea were associated with poorer quality of life.


