Close relatives’ experiences of transitions when living with a person with traumatic brain injury (TBI)

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Background

When someone is afflicted by a traumatic brain injury (TBI) it entails a sudden change in life for their close relatives. New living patterns have to be developed by the family in order to achieve balance in the new situation.

Aim

The aim of this study was to describe transitions experienced by close relatives of people with TBI.
Transition

Meleis (1991) described transition as a change in health status, in role relations, in expectations or in abilities.

Transition= 'the passage or movement from one state, condition or place to another' (Chick & Meleis, 1986, p. 239).
Participants

Five close relatives, all women, who lived with or close to a person with TBI were interviewed.

Data analysis

The data were analysed in accordance with a qualitative interpretive method as described by Thorne et al. (1997).
Findings

The starting point of the transitions
Transitions in pattern of daily life
Transitions in relationship
Transitions in social life
The starting point of the transitions

First, the most important thing was that he wouldn’t die from this and then that maybe he could learn to walk even if he could only get into a wheelchair, then when I realized he was damaged so much that he wouldn’t be able to talk. Well, then it was just important that he kept his mind, and he did... you change your positions continually...
Transitions in pattern of daily life

It was a long road back before he started to learn again, he couldn’t walk, he couldn’t talk, he couldn’t really... it was like he was newly born. I mean he had to learn everything again and he hadn’t much left, he had to start all over completely, and in way we also felt it was kind of new start, it was like learning to know a new person even though he was the same but he was a changed person.
Transitions in relationship

Life changed radically in that we had focused a lot on him [son with TBI] which was maybe a bit strange for his brother, I've now realized that, we were a bit too focused on him compared to his brother, but with this accident everything became focused on him.
Transitions in social life

I felt very sad in the beginning when people crossed over to the other side of the street... I still find it hard to accept that people pretend to be in a hurry or not to see... I realize they find it difficult but I can't accept it and I think we should all be so informed about damage and such things that they ought to be able manage to come over and say hello but they seem to think that is too hard.
Conclusion

The transitions of daily life for close relatives began suddenly and unexpectedly as the person with TBI was injured.

The close relatives were extensively affected by the injury; they were continually on standby for the injured person.

The relation to the person with TBI changed and close relatives had to take on a greater responsibility.
The close relatives expressed sorrow that friends of the person with TBI avoided them, which made the person with TBI lonely. When the person with TBI was met by others in a proper way, both the person and the close relatives felt better.

Still the close relatives hoped that the injured person would be able to manage their daily life in a more independent way.
Engström Å & Söderberg S (in press) Transition as experienced by close relatives of people with traumatic brain injury. *Journal of Neuroscience Nursing*

Thank you!