

# Frailty and decision making in older people with lung cancer

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## Introduction

In the UK, the number of older people being diagnosed with lung cancer is increasing. Some older people will also have other health problems and might be frail. Evidence suggests that older people may not always be offered the same treatment options as younger patients and there is little current research that has examined the reasons for this<sup>1</sup>.

## Aims

To explore the views of older people when they are diagnosed with lung cancer and the factors that influence this. To explore the views of older people and health care professionals with regard to the extent to which frailty influences treatment decisions.

## Methods

A cross-sectional qualitative study was undertaken. Between September 2018 and April 2019 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 older patients with lung cancer and 11 health care professionals. Data were analysed using Framework Analysis.

### Patients listen to staff

*I said well, I'm in your hands, you let me know what you want me to do, I'll come and do it (P1)*

*I felt I had an option, I felt the advice was very strong .....and it made sense, the way it was presented, it was presented very carefully and positively (P6)*

### Frailty is negative

*Somebody rather dodderly. Probably with shaky hands, not able to do a great deal for themselves (P11)*

*The picture that would spring to mind is a very underweight, weak person, who is unable to care for themselves (HCP 1)*

### Frailty is difficult to assess

*What an oncologist would say....versus a physicia n...a CNS....they're different...we're all looking at it in a slightly different way (HCP 2)*

*I would not refer to many as frail, but it's a difficult concept, so I think we prefer performance status (HCP 3)*

## Conclusion

Our study explored the views of older people with lung cancer and health care professionals with regard to the extent to which frailty influences treatment decisions. The study found that older people often feel that they are in the hands of their health care professionals and that they are often given the same treatment options as younger patients. However, some older people may not always be offered the same treatment options as younger patients and there is little current research that has examined the reasons for this. The study also found that health care professionals often view frailty as a negative attribute and that it is difficult to assess. The study highlights the need for further research into frailty and decision making in older people with lung cancer.