



Exploring Patients' Lived Experiences with New Drug Therapies for Chronic Illnesses: Understanding Perceptions, Emotional Reactions, and Social Impacts

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ABSTRACT

The increasing reliance on pharmaceutical treatments has highlighted the need to better understand the subjective experiences of patients using new medications. While clinical studies have focused on the effectiveness of these drugs, little is known about how patients perceive, emotionally react to, and psychologically cope with their treatment regimens. Existing research often overlooks the emotional and psychological impacts that influence patients' engagement with medication, as well as the social support that may mitigate negative responses. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the lived experiences of patients using new drugs for chronic conditions. Here, we employed an interpretative phenomenological approach to investigate how patients perceive the efficacy of their treatment, cope with side effects, and interact with their social environment during the treatment process. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 patients, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover key themes related to emotional reactions, psychological coping strategies, social support systems, and treatment outcomes. The findings revealed that patients' emotional responses to side effects and the social support they receive from family, friends, and healthcare providers significantly influenced their perceptions of treatment success. These results provide valuable insights into the complexities of medication adherence and patient engagement, suggesting that a more holistic approach to treatment, which incorporates both emotional well-being and clinical dimensions, is essential. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of patient experiences, emphasizing the importance of emotional and social factors in treatment engagement, and has implications for future research aimed at improving patient-centered care and enhancing treatment outcomes.



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INTRODUCTION

The increasing reliance on pharmaceutical treatments to manage chronic diseases has led to a growing body of research focusing on drug efficacy, side effects, and patient adherence (Nabirye et al., 2025). While clinical studies have extensively examined the objective effectiveness of drugs, less attention has been paid to the subjective experiences of patients who use these medications in their daily lives (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). In particular, the emotional and psychological impacts of new treatments on patients, as well as how they perceive and interpret the efficacy of these drugs, have not been explored in depth. This gap is critical because patients' experiences can profoundly influence their engagement with treatment, adherence to prescribed regimens, and overall quality of life.

The significance of understanding these subjective experiences is highlighted by the recognition that healthcare interventions, including pharmacological treatments, are not only medical but also deeply social and psychological phenomena (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025). The way patients interact with their treatments is shaped by cultural norms, social support systems, and individual perceptions. For example, patients' trust in a new drug and their responses to side effects are influenced by their prior experiences with healthcare, the medical community's trustworthiness, and their personal beliefs about illness and

healing. Therefore, investigating these experiences can provide valuable insights into how treatment regimens are navigated and integrated into patients' lives.

The need for an in-depth exploration of these subjective experiences aligns with the goals of phenomenological research, which seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of their world. In the context of this study, phenomenology offers a robust framework to examine the lived experiences of patients using new medications, focusing not just on their clinical outcomes but also on the meaning they attach to their treatment journey (Zhaleh & Estaji, 2025). By delving into the personal and emotional dimensions of medication use, this research aims to uncover the underlying factors that influence patients' decision-making processes, their relationship with healthcare providers, and their overall experience with chronic disease management.

Research into the subjective experiences of individuals facing specific phenomena, particularly within healthcare and medical treatments, has increasingly become a crucial area of study (Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024). Understanding how individuals perceive and make sense of their interactions with new medications provides valuable insights that cannot be captured solely through clinical or quantitative approaches (Ciaccio et al., 2024). This research focus is vital because it delves deeper into the lived experiences of patients, illuminating how they navigate the complexities of treatment, including the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions that shape their perceptions of medication effectiveness.

However, exploring the meaning of these experiences is methodologically challenging. Traditional quantitative methods, which often focus on numerical data and statistical analyses, fall short when it comes to capturing the depth and richness of patients' personal experiences (Zhang et al., 2021). These approaches may quantify the frequency of side effects or the success rate of a drug, but they cannot explain how patients emotionally respond to these factors or how they interpret their treatment in the context of their own lives (Nurmaganbetova et al., 2025). Phenomenological research, by contrast, offers a more nuanced approach that seeks to understand the essence of these lived experiences, but it also faces its own challenges (Moreno-Padilla et al., 2025). One of the main obstacles is the difficulty in collecting and interpreting data that is both deeply personal and complex. Additionally, phenomenological analysis requires an in-depth understanding of the cultural, social, and individual factors that influence each patient's experience, making it a labor-intensive and context-sensitive process.

These methodological challenges underline the limitations of previous research in fully capturing the essence of patients' experiences with new drugs. Many studies have focused on clinical outcomes, but few have examined the subjective, experiential aspects of treatment. As a result, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how patients interpret the benefits, risks, and emotional impacts of new therapies. This gap highlights the need for a research approach that can explore and interpret these personal, subjective experiences in a way that provides a more complete picture of the treatment process and its effects on patients' lives.

In the context of understanding the experiences of patients using new medications, the most common solutions have typically involved practical, quantitative approaches (Dupré & Wille, 2025). These approaches often focus on clinical outcomes such as symptom reduction or adherence rates, and while they provide valuable data on treatment effectiveness, they fail to capture the deeper, subjective meanings behind these experiences (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). As a result, the current body of research remains limited in its ability to fully address the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of medication use, leaving a significant gap in understanding the true impact of these treatments on patients' lives.

The limitations of these practical, outcome-focused approaches lie in their inability to explore the intricate personal experiences and perceptions of patients. While they may quantify aspects like the frequency of side effects or the degree of symptom relief, they do not account for the subjective interpretation of these factors, nor do they explore how these experiences influence the patients' overall sense of well-being. Such insights are crucial for a more holistic understanding of the treatment process. Consequently, existing research has provided a somewhat one-dimensional view of medication use, one that overlooks the complexity of individual experiences.

An alternative and more comprehensive solution to address these gaps is the adoption of phenomenological methods, which offer a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of patients. Phenomenology, with its focus on understanding the essence of experiences, allows for a richer, more nuanced view of how patients perceive and make sense of their treatment journey (Shah et al., 2021). By exploring the meaning of patients' experiences in their own terms, phenomenology can shed light on aspects that traditional methods fail to capture, such as the emotional reactions, social influences, and personal interpretations that shape how patients engage with new medications (Tong et al., 2025). This approach holds the potential to provide a more holistic understanding of the patient experience and, by doing so, enrich the discourse around treatment efficacy and healthcare interventions.

Research on patients' experiences with new medications has been growing, particularly in understanding the complex, subjective nature of these experiences (Gyebuni et al., 2025). Previous studies have primarily focused on clinical outcomes, such as drug efficacy and adherence rates, often overlooking the emotional and social aspects that influence patient perspectives. Theoretical frameworks, such as the Health Belief Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior, have been used to explore how patients' beliefs and attitudes affect their health behaviors. However, these models, while useful, often neglect the deeper, lived experiences of patients, which are central to understanding how treatments are perceived and integrated into everyday life (Zhao et al., 2025). Literature on phenomenology has been less prevalent in this area, though it offers a crucial lens for exploring the lived experiences of individuals, capturing the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of health interventions.

The phenomenological approach used in this study is specifically chosen to address the gaps identified in prior research. Phenomenology allows for an in-depth exploration of the meanings patients attach to their experiences with new treatments, emphasizing the lived realities of those undergoing medical interventions (Sun et al., 2022). By adopting this methodology, we aim to uncover not just the clinical outcomes of treatment but the profound ways in which patients interpret, adapt to, and emotionally respond to their treatment journeys (Li et al., 2024). This method provides the opportunity to explore subjective experiences in a way that traditional, quantitative research cannot, ensuring that the essence of patients' perceptions is captured. In doing so, we aim to provide a richer, more holistic understanding of medication use, one that accounts for the individual and contextual factors influencing treatment outcomes.

This article is structured to guide the reader through a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon being studied (Ben-Zeev et al., 2024). It begins with an introduction to the background of the research, outlining the context and significance of understanding patients' subjective experiences. The methodological approach, including data collection and analysis processes, follows, detailing how phenomenology provides insights into the lived experiences of participants (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023). The results are then presented through thematic analysis, providing a detailed narrative of the themes identified in the data. Finally, the discussion offers an interpretation of the findings in the context of existing literature, and the article concludes by summarizing the implications of the research and suggesting areas for future study.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a phenomenological approach, which is particularly suitable for exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals. Phenomenology focuses on the subjective experiences of participants, aiming to uncover the meanings they attribute to specific phenomena. The primary goal of this approach is to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals make sense of their experiences in a particular context (Lutz & Knox, 2014; McNabb, 2015). This design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of patients' personal perceptions and emotional reactions to new drug therapies, aligning with the research objectives of understanding the essence of their experiences. Specifically, an interpretative phenomenological approach was used to examine not only the descriptions of the experiences but also how participants make sense of and interpret those

experiences. This method facilitates a nuanced understanding of complex phenomena such as medication adherence, efficacy, and emotional reactions.

Participants

The participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation the use of a new drug for managing their health condition (Hillman & Radel, 2018; Migdal, 2018). The inclusion criteria required participants to be adults (aged 18 and above), diagnosed with a chronic illness for which the new drug was prescribed, and actively undergoing treatment. Participants were also required to have used the new drug for at least one month to ensure they had sufficient experience with the medication. Exclusion criteria included individuals who had received other concurrent treatments that could confound the results, or those with severe cognitive impairments that might hinder their ability to provide in-depth accounts of their experiences. A total of 15 participants (8 male, 7 female) were included in the study, with an average age of 45 years. The sample represented a diverse range of chronic conditions, ensuring a broad perspective on the experience of using the new drug.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while maintaining a focus on key topics. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet and comfortable environment to ensure participants felt at ease sharing their experiences (Carreiras & Castro, 2012; Iosifides, 2016). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. A semi-structured interview guide was used, which included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' perceptions of the drug's efficacy, side effects, and impact on their daily lives. The interview guide was developed based on a review of the literature and refined through pilot testing with a small subset of participants. The data were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

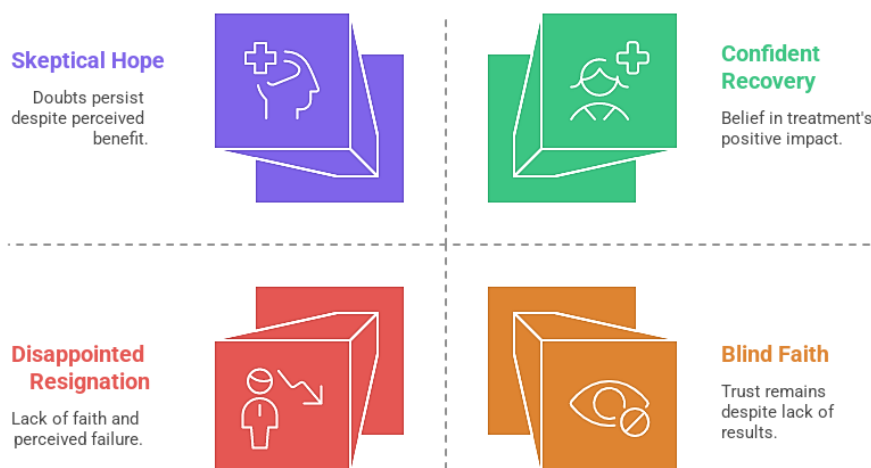
Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is well-suited for identifying and interpreting the meaning of lived experiences (Fife, 2020; Kawamura, 2020). The analysis process involved several systematic steps. First, the transcribed interviews were read multiple times to immerse in the data and gain a comprehensive understanding of each participant's experience. Then, key phrases and significant statements related to the research questions were identified and coded (Daly, 2007; Longhofer et al., 2012). These initial codes were organized into themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. Through a process of refining and connecting themes, a set of main themes and sub-themes emerged, reflecting the key aspects of the participants' lived experiences with the new drug. The analysis was conducted using NVivo software to facilitate data organization, though the focus remained on the manual interpretation of the data to preserve the depth and richness of the phenomenological approach.

RESULTS

Perception of Drug Efficacy and Trust in Treatment

The participants shared varied perceptions of the new drug's efficacy in managing their health conditions. Many expressed a sense of hope and relief upon starting the treatment, believing that the drug would provide a breakthrough in their battle with disease. One participant stated, "I was so tired of trying other treatments. When I started the new medication, I felt an immediate sense of trust. It gave me hope again." However, not all experiences were uniformly positive. A participant noted, "At first, I thought the medication would solve everything, but over time, I noticed side effects that made me question its effectiveness." These sentiments reflect a complex relationship between expectations and reality, where trust in the drug initially outweighed doubts but was later tempered by the presence of adverse effects. Thematic analysis revealed that initial trust was often linked to a strong desire for improvement, but doubts emerged when the side effects became more pronounced. These emotional fluctuations were central to the participants' evolving relationship with the drug.

Trust Efficacy Balance



Side Effects and Emotional Reactions to Treatment

As the treatment continued, several participants voiced concerns about the side effects, which ranged from mild discomfort to more severe reactions. These experiences were central to their overall perception of the treatment's success. One participant shared, "The side effects were worse than the illness itself at times. I could barely function during the first weeks." This sentiment was echoed by others who felt that the impact of side effects overshadowed the potential benefits of the treatment. A participant explained, "It's difficult to think of the drug as effective when every day I have to cope with constant headaches and nausea. I don't know if it's worth it." Despite these challenges, there were also instances where participants indicated that the benefits of the drug, in terms of symptom relief, eventually outweighed the discomfort of side effects. One patient reflected, "Eventually, I noticed the benefits more clearly. The side effects were there, but I learned to manage them." The analysis step-by-step identified that patients who reported more severe emotional reactions to side effects tended to express more doubt about the efficacy of the drug, while those who found ways to manage the side effects, often with social or psychological support, developed a more positive outlook on the treatment.

Social and Psychological Factors in Medication Acceptance

The experience of medication was also deeply influenced by social and psychological factors. Participants frequently highlighted the role of family and peer support in navigating their treatment journey. "My family has been my biggest support," one participant said. "They help me manage the side effects and encourage me to keep going." These social influences were critical in shaping their commitment to the treatment, even in the face of difficulties. Conversely, some participants reported feelings of isolation, especially when family members did not fully understand the nature of the drug or its side effects. One participant noted, "My friends didn't get it. They couldn't understand why I kept going through with the treatment when I looked so sick." The thematic analysis highlighted that the perception of support from family and peers was strongly linked to emotional resilience and treatment adherence. Participants with more supportive networks were better able to cope with emotional challenges and side effects.

Impact of Treatment on Daily Life and Quality of Life

The medication also had significant effects on the participants' daily lives and their quality of life. While some reported a gradual return to normalcy and an improvement in their ability to engage in daily activities, others felt that the treatment disrupted their routines. "I've started feeling like myself again after months of feeling weak," shared one participant. However, for some, the ongoing treatment left them feeling disconnected from their previous life, as another participant described: "I still feel like I can't do things I used to enjoy because the medication just drains me." This divergence in experiences highlights the diverse impacts of treatment on quality of life, showing that while some participants felt empowered, others faced limitations in their daily functioning. The analysis revealed a direct link

between the severity of side effects and the perceived reduction in quality of life, with participants who experienced more intense side effects reporting more significant disruptions in their daily lives.

The results of this study reveal the multifaceted nature of patient experiences with new drug treatments. While initial trust and hope were commonly expressed, these sentiments were often complicated by the presence of side effects and the emotional and social challenges patients faced. Social support played a crucial role in sustaining adherence to treatment, and the impact of the drug on daily life was both positive and negative, reflecting a balance between perceived efficacy and side effects. Ultimately, these findings provide valuable insights into how patients perceive and navigate their treatment journeys, underscoring the importance of addressing both clinical and psychosocial factors in therapeutic interventions. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how emotional reactions, social support, and psychological coping mechanisms influence treatment outcomes, suggesting that future interventions should integrate these dimensions to improve patient engagement and care.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Key Findings

This study revealed the multifaceted nature of patients' experiences with new drug therapies, highlighting the complex interplay between expectations, emotional reactions, and social influences. Patients reported initial trust and hope in the medication, but these feelings were often complicated by side effects and emotional challenges that shaped their perceptions of the drug's effectiveness. These findings provide valuable insights into the subjective reality of medication use, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence patient engagement with treatment.

Contribution of Findings to the Research Question

The findings of this study contribute directly to the understanding of patients' subjective experiences with new medications, answering the central research question regarding how individuals perceive, interpret, and react to their treatment journeys. While previous studies have largely focused on clinical outcomes or adherence rates, this research delves deeper into the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of treatment (Lowenstein et al., 2023). By examining how patients navigate both the benefits and challenges of their therapy, this study sheds light on the nuanced ways in which treatment success is experienced not just as a clinical outcome, but as a deeply personal journey (Halboup et al., 2025). The emotional and psychological factors revealed in the data suggest that patients' engagement with medication is influenced not only by its physical effects but also by their ability to cope with side effects and the level of support they receive from their social networks.

Relation to Literature and Previous Theories

The findings align with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of the emotional and psychological aspects of medication use. Previous studies have shown that patients' trust in their treatment and their ability to manage side effects significantly influence their overall treatment experience (Horne et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2011). However, this study extends the understanding by integrating social and emotional factors, showing that support from family and peers plays a crucial role in sustaining adherence to treatment and shaping overall treatment outcomes (Betzler et al., 2024). The theme of side effects and their emotional toll is consistent with research on chronic illness management, where side effects often outweigh the perceived benefits of the medication, leading to treatment discontinuation (Figueiras et al., 2005). Furthermore, the findings resonate with the Health Belief Model (Rosenstock, 1974), which posits that patients' perceptions of the severity of their illness and the benefits of treatment influence their health behaviors. However, this study adds a layer of depth by highlighting how these perceptions are intertwined with personal and social contexts, which may not be adequately addressed by the model.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have important scientific and practical implications for both the field of pharmacology and the broader healthcare context. Clinically, understanding the emotional and psychological experiences of patients using new medications can inform healthcare providers about the factors that influence treatment adherence and success (J. Wang et al., 2025). The impact of side effects on patients' overall perception of treatment highlights the need for more patient-centered care that takes into account not just the drug's efficacy but also its social and emotional consequences. In practice, healthcare professionals should be aware of the role that family and social support networks play in sustaining patients' engagement with their treatment regimens. This insight encourages a more holistic approach to healthcare, where communication with patients goes beyond medical facts to include emotional and social considerations. Furthermore, the study's findings could be used to develop interventions that better support patients in managing side effects and navigating the psychological challenges of chronic illness treatment.

From a social and cultural perspective, the study underscores how deeply patients' experiences with medication are shaped by cultural and personal beliefs. The perceptions and coping strategies described by the participants reflect broader social dynamics, including the role of family in healthcare decisions, societal attitudes toward illness, and the stigma associated with certain treatments. These findings offer valuable insights for healthcare systems operating in diverse cultural settings, highlighting the need to tailor treatment approaches to fit the unique social contexts of different populations (Tabynov et al., 2025). In a broader societal context, this research may inform policy makers and healthcare institutions about the importance of integrating psychological and social factors into the design of healthcare services and patient support programs.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the subjective experiences of patients using new medications, there are limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. One key limitation is the relatively small and specific sample size, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population. The participants were selected from a single healthcare setting, and their experiences may not fully represent those of patients in different contexts or with different health conditions (L.-Y. Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by participants' memories, biases, or willingness to disclose sensitive information. Another limitation is the scope of the research, which focused solely on patients' perspectives without exploring the views of healthcare providers or family members, who may also play a significant role in shaping patients' treatment experiences. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a larger, more diverse sample and exploring the experiences of other stakeholders involved in the treatment process.

Future Research Directions

The findings from this study open several avenues for future research. One potential direction is to further explore how social and cultural factors influence patients' emotional and psychological responses to new medications, particularly in diverse populations. Future studies could also examine how healthcare systems can better integrate patients' subjective experiences into treatment planning, ensuring that both the physical and emotional needs of patients are addressed. Additionally, research could investigate the long-term impact of chronic medication use on patients' quality of life, with a focus on how their experiences evolve over time and how they cope with ongoing treatment. Expanding the scope of this research to include other health conditions or different types of therapies would provide a broader understanding of how patients' perceptions shape treatment outcomes. Ultimately, these studies could contribute to the development of more effective, patient-centered healthcare practices that prioritize the emotional and social dimensions of illness management.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the subjective experiences of patients using new drug therapies, addressing the gap in understanding the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of medication use. The findings reveal that patients' perceptions of drug efficacy are deeply influenced by side effects, social support, and emotional reactions, which are often overlooked in traditional clinical research. By using a phenomenological approach, this study provides a more holistic understanding of how patients navigate their treatment journeys, offering insights into the complex factors that affect treatment adherence and satisfaction. The results contribute to a broader understanding of the patient experience, highlighting the need for more patient-centered care practices that take into account not only clinical outcomes but also emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and social support. Practical applications of these findings suggest that healthcare providers should integrate emotional and social dimensions into treatment plans to improve patient engagement and adherence, ensuring a more comprehensive approach to care. Future research could focus on the integration of social support in treatment models, investigating how different types of social networks—such as family, friends, and healthcare professionals—can be leveraged to enhance treatment experiences. Additionally, exploring the long-term impact of chronic medication use on emotional health and social relationships would provide further insights into the sustainability of patient engagement in treatment. Expanding the scope of phenomenological studies in this area could help refine healthcare practices, improve patient support systems, and inform the development of more inclusive treatment models in diverse healthcare settings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

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