Visible impact and experiences of health professional consultation: a qualitative study of people with psoriasis

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INTRODUCTION: Psoriasis is a long-term inflammatory skin condition affecting around 2% of the UK population. It can impact on a person’s quality of life, psychological and social functioning. Little is known about patients’ perspectives about the impact of psoriasis on their lives and how they experience consultations with health professionals in both primary and secondary care.

METHODS: A qualitative study was carried out with people recruited from community sources across the North West of England who had responded to an advertisement. Data were collected with consent from a purposive sample of 20 people through in-depth semi-structured interviews about coping with psoriasis. Verbatim transcripts of interviews were analysed using the constant comparison method.

RESULTS: Respondents identified the visual impact of psoriasis as the worst aspect of the condition, describing its impact on relationships and strategies to cope. People also reported difficulties in interactions with health professionals, in particular their failure to acknowledge the degree of impact which psoriasis has on wellbeing. Participants perceived a lack of specialist knowledge among GPs as well as few opportunities to discuss their condition with and inadequate information from practitioners in secondary care.

DISCUSSION: Health professionals might better support people with psoriasis by acknowledging the significant emotional impact of the condition’s visibility, engaging not only with physical management but with the emotional and social consequences they experience. Professionals need to be able to explore people’s understanding of psoriasis; identifying issues of importance to each individual so that more tailored support can be provided.