“When you’re at work you’ve got a goal [..] but that’s all finished for me now”; exploring goal perception amongst people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Goal-setting is described as a ‘cornerstone’ of rehabilitation, for which patient-clinician collaboration is advocated. Despite support for goal-setting, research in neurology and musculoskeletal settings suggests that patients may struggle to identify goals. Whilst patients with COPD commonly attend rehabilitation, little research has explored goals in this group.

**Aim:** To explore perceptions of goals amongst patients with stable COPD.

**Methods:** Thirteen, purposively selected patients (7 male) aged 45-80 years with mild-very severe COPD, participated in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted and audio-recorded in patients’ homes or on a University campus. Data were transcribed verbatim, analysed thematically and managed using NVivo 10. Researcher reflexivity, constant comparison, negative case analysis and peer review were employed to enhance rigour.

**Results:** Whilst all patients described having things they wanted to achieve, not all considered such achievements to be ‘goals’. Consequently, not all reported having ‘goals’. Some patients reported moving towards their goals spontaneously, whereas others described mapping clear pathways to achieving their goals. Physical fitness, social circumstances and life events were particular barriers/facilitators to goal pursuit and achievement.

**Conclusion:** Patients with COPD may differ in their understanding of, and approach to achieving, goals. This presents a challenge to health professionals working with this group, who may need to consider modifying their language, and adapting the process of goal-setting, to suit the individual’s worldview.

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