

Title:

**AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF
PRACTICE NURSES IN RELATION TO PATIENTS ON A METHADONE TREATMENT
PROTOCOL**

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Background: Since the introduction of the Methadone Treatment Protocol (MTP) in the Republic of Ireland in 1998 (DOH 1998), practice nurses were increasingly becoming involved in the care of drug misusers in general practice. A small cohort of nurses working in urban general practice had training in the Irish College of General. No studies had been undertaken previously which had highlighted the role of the practice nurse with drug misusers and the role in general had been hidden. This study illuminated the hidden resource of the practice nurse and the many facets of the role within the exemplar of methadone maintenance.

Methods:

The study was guided by a phenomenological research design which investigated the experiences of 8 practice nurses. In depth interviews were used to explore the nurses' involvement with patients receiving methadone treatment in general practice.

Population:

8 Participants who were working alongside a GP who was registered as a Level 1 or Level 2 provider of methadone maintenance were purposefully sampled from a population of 8 practice sites in Dublin.

Recruitment

GP's were approached to gain both permission and access to their employee.

Inclusion Criteria:

- a) Those who were willing to participate and provide informed consent
- b) Those who could provide a wide range of experience ie those nurses involved in managing drug misusers directly and those who were involved in care indirectly.

Data Analysis

The psychological research methods advocated by Colaizzi (1978) produced a structural definition of the findings.

Initial reading of all the 'protocols' (transcripts) to acquire a feeling for them was followed by Colaizzi's six steps of analysis.

Findings

Five descriptive themes emerged from the data in relation to patients on a MTP.

The experience of what it is to be a practice nurse

Practice nurse's understanding of collaborative practice

The practice nurse as a valuable resource in relation to patients on a MTP

The frustrations associated with the MTP

Professional attitudes and marginalisation of patients on a MTP.

References:

Colaizzi, P.F. (1978) Psychological Research as the Phenomenologist Views It. In: *Existential-Phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology* (Valle, R, S.King.M.eds) Oxford University Press, Chapter 3:48-71

The Methadone Treatment Services Review Group 1998) Department of Health and Children, Hawkins House, Dublin.