

PATIENT DEATH: NURSES' EXPERIENCE IN GENERAL PRACTICE

A hermeneutic phenomenological research study.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of nurses' experience of patient death in General Practice. A qualitative approach, using hermeneutic phenomenology is used for the study.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, National University of Ireland, Galway in January 2009, following submission of a proposal. Letters of invitation were sent to a population of practice nurses in the Mid-West of Ireland to participate in the study. Subsequently, a purposeful sample of eight willing Practice Nurses working in rural and small urban practices was chosen.

Data was collected using informal semi-structured interviews, after written informed consent was obtained from the participants. These interviews were tape recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The data collected was analysed using Van Manen's approach.

Following in depth data analysis the following themes were identified by the researcher, in an effort to conceptualise the nurse experience of patient death in general practice.

- Loss
- Grief Issues
- Managing Bereavement
- Professionalism and Emotional Caring
- A Respectful Environment
- Caring for Self
- Comparing Nursing Experiences

In conclusion, nurses in the General Practice setting in primary care work in a unique environment that is quite different from the hospital setting, yet there are some commonalities with other nursing disciplines in the nurse experience of patient death. Because the nurses in general practice often develop long term relationships with patients and their families, tending to people across the lifespan, their experience of patient death in general practice is also very much about managing the grief and bereavement of their patients and families and unlike other nursing disciplines, closure is often not possible. Although most of the nurses appeared to cope with this issue, the majority considered that further education in grief and bereavement management would benefit them in dealing with the experience of patient death in General Practice.

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