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THE PROVING GROUND

The Lived World of Nursing Students in Their Pre-Registration Clinical Experience

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Nursing at Massey University.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and interpret the lived world of twenty one senior Comprehensive Nursing Students in their pre-registration experience. The study set out to answer the question "What is the lived experience of Comprehensive Nursing students in their pre-registration experience ?" The pre-registration experience is a six to eight week block of clinical practice prior to sitting their State Registration Examination when the students work as soon-to-be staff nurses independent of close tutor contact. The study setting was in acute care clinical placements which included Emergency Departments, Theatre, Surgical, Medical, Paediatric wards and specialised Day Stay Clinics.

The study showed that students of nursing use an orientation period to gain confidence in a setting and engage willingly in their clinical practice. They use their theoretical knowledge to gain a "handle" on the demands of a nursing care situation, become involved in the client-nurse relationship which challenges their knowledge, skills and attitudes and opens new learning demands within the situation. They pursue specialised knowledge both directly and indirectly in order to function competently. Other registered nurses in the clinical setting are extremely important to facilitate the students learning and support the students in a host of ways from initiating opportunities to teaching specialised skills. The study re-iterates the importance of clinical experience to the gaining of nursing expertise.

A lack of job prospects was a dampening factor for the students but nevertheless, it did not inhibit their full engagement in their pre-registration experience.

The phenomenological method allows an experience to be captured in its wholeness to include the way the study participants thought, acted and engaged in nursing activities within a specific context. It is from the students' rich descriptions of their practice that this study gains its significance as it is the first phenomenological study of its kind in a New Zealand setting.

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