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**Lived experiences of nurses as they engage in practice
at an advanced level within emergency departments
in New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy Human Social Science (Nursing)

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Abstract

At this present time New Zealand has seventeen Nurse Practitioners™ none of whom work in the emergency setting; nonetheless emergency nurses throughout New Zealand are practising at an advanced level in departments nationwide. The aim of this research project was to examine the lived experiences of five nurses as they prepare for, and engage in practice at an advanced level within emergency departments in New Zealand.

The theoretical framework for this project was one of phenomenological enquiry based on a synthesis of Husserlian and Heideggerian philosophy. Following a form of purposive sampling to select participants, unstructured in-depth interviews were used as the method of choice for data collection. The concept of data horizontalisation integrated within Colaizzi's (1979) procedural steps for data examination guided the analysis and findings of this work.

Descriptions of the participants lived experiences, underpinned by Husserlian principals, identified eight subjects that were explored in-depth from their perspective. This was followed by further analysis, interpretation and discussion of the phenomenon under review from the researcher's perspective; guided by the fundamental elements of the Heideggerian approach to enquiry.

The results show that there are numerous similarities to be had in common with our colleagues overseas in relation to the many issues that impact on nurses working in or toward advanced practice within emergency departments here in New Zealand. However there also exist issues that are unique to the New Zealand context and as such have the potential to impact either positively or negatively on the development of the advanced nursing role in this country, such as the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance (HPCA) Act 2003 and other legislation that relate either directly or indirectly to the scope of practice for advanced practitioners, whatever their area of expertise.

The research process identified several concepts that require further debate and discussion; from which knowledge can be gained that will either add to or augment the body of knowledge that is required for the advancement of nursing practice within emergency departments here in New Zealand.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Objectives and aim of this research project

Objectives and aim of this research project

Throughout the world various spheres within the nursing profession both in form and context are experiencing major change. Colleagues from countries such as America and the United Kingdom are forging ahead in the process of transforming nursing itself into a more autonomous profession. Other countries such as Australia and Canada are also contributing to this phenomenon. New Zealand itself has not stood in the shadows while this change has been occurring.

The advent of the Nurse Practitioner™ concept in New Zealand may well be in its infancy, however its development and implementation has not gone unnoticed. As demonstrated by internationally renowned nursing luminary Brian Dolan, during his keynote speech at the New Zealand Emergency Nurses Conference held in Auckland 2002; this will be highlighted and discussed in context during chapters three, six and eight of the work respectively

At this present time, November 2005, New Zealand has seventeen Nurse Practitioners™ none of whom work in the emergency-nursing setting. Nonetheless work in this specific area is occurring; therefore the author proposed to undertake research in to the perceptions and experiences of nurses as they prepare for, and engage in practice at an advanced level within emergency departments throughout New Zealand.

Research from America and the United Kingdom, where nurses have been practicing at an advanced level in some form or other for the past forty years, indicates that the path taken toward professional autonomy has not been an easy one to tread. As will be discussed, there has been much misinformation, negativity and opposition to the development of these roles in these two countries.

Both America and the United Kingdom have a well-established research culture within the nursing paradigm; however as will be shown in chapter three, such research tends to be based on the positivist, objective bio-medical model of care rather than the holistic whole-person approach. Notwithstanding this, research from both these countries has and continues to contribute to the overall advancement of the profession.

In contrast to the American and United Kingdom perspective, whereby research of this nature has predominantly been carried out using quantitative methods; the author [student researcher] proposes to use a qualitative approach to explore the real life experiences of these individuals, as they strive to expand the profession within their given field. As will be analysed and discussed the qualitative approach to research has much in common with the underlying principals of nursing, with its holistic, individualised approach. Taking into account socio-cultural, politico-economic, religious and spiritual needs alongside the physical variables that exist within each individual.

The theoretical framework chosen for this project was one of phenomenological enquiry based on a synthesis of Husserlian Transcendentalism and Heideggerian Hermeneutics, utilising unstructured in-depth interviews as the method of choice for data collection. The fact that this phenomenon is in the early stages of development in New Zealand limits the numbers of research participants available, therefore a form of purposive sampling, primary selection, was used to select participants. The concept of data horizontalisation integrated within Colaizzi's (1979) procedural steps for data examination guided the analysis and findings of this work.

The main objectives of this project were one, to explore the perceptions and experiences of nurses as they prepare for and engage in practice at an advanced level within the emergency department setting here in New Zealand. Two, that information produced from the research would enhance the body of knowledge related to the phenomenon under investigation; which will subsequently assist in the development of the Nurse Practitioner™ Emergency and Trauma role here in New Zealand.

However having made the above statement, in this present age of increased patient attendances and elevated emergency department waiting times; exacerbated by a shortage of experienced medical and nursing staff. Ultimately the long term aim of this project would be that information gleaned from the work will assist in improving patient care for those individuals attending the emergency department by offering a more diverse set of appropriate options related to their health needs; which would eventually include assessment and treatment by autonomous nurse practitioners within the emergency department setting here in New Zealand.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was sought from both Massey Universities Human Ethics Committee and Wellington Regional Ethical Committee; written informed consent was obtained from all participants (Appendix A). An information sheet that outlines the aims and objectives of the research proposal was designed for potential participants prior to the start of the project (Appendix B). Included within this information sheet is a full description of the methodology. Further to this emphasis is placed on the fact that the participants are seen as equal partners in this research project and that they along with the author have a shared ownership of the venture. Moreover the participants were empowered to withdraw any or all of their material without question at any time during the project.

Note:

Depending on the context in which it is written the author will refer to themselves as either “the author” or “student researcher” throughout this work.