Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
'On the path, off the trail':
The relational work of nurses in outreach health

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of Masters of Philosophy in Nursing at Massey University, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

Garrick Martin
2017
Abstract

This research study draws on the practice reflections of nurses working with people who are homeless and experiencing mental health problems to explore engagement as a core nursing practice in this setting. Therapeutic relationships and engagement are at the heart of nursing practice, and this is especially so in mental health nursing. Homeless and hard-to-reach clients are an underserved population for mental health services. This research seeks to ‘make visible’ the ways in which mental health nurses uniquely and successfully engage with people experiencing homelessness and marginalisation, which in turn contributes to improved health and social outcomes for those people.

Eight New Zealand registered nurses were interviewed and critical thematic analysis used to interpret the resulting data. The research findings were that nurses practicing in this specific homeless health context value relationships as a core nursing intervention. The work of engagement was described as uncertain. The research participants echoed the nursing theory and literature that argues nurses’ relational work is often unseen and undervalued within health systems. Relational work is described as a defining concept for mental health nursing yet the lack of visibility of this skilled work adds to nurses’ experience of uncertainty. The recommendations suggest ways to render visible and hold central the nursing work of engagement.
“The relentless complexity of the world is off to the side of the trail.”
Gary Snyder (1990, p. 145)
from the essay *On the Path, Off the Trail.*

“You do not know what wars are going on down there / where the spirit meets the bone.”
Miller Williams (1997, p. 55)
from the poem *Compassion.*
Acknowledgments

Ko Stack te maunga
Ko Moana tuauriuri te moana
Ko Partizanka te waka
Ko Brian Martin rāua ko Elaine Bennett ōku mātua
Ko Garrick Martin tōku ingoa
Te Whanga-nui-a-Tara te wā kāinga
Kei Tāmaki Makaurau toku kāinga inaianei

Firstly, acknowledgements to those people experiencing homelessness in Aotearoa New Zealand, whose struggles and health needs motivate this work.

I am very grateful to the inspiring nurses who gave up their time to share their knowledge and stories as participants in this research.

Thank you to Te Pou and Health Work Force New Zealand for providing postgraduate funding for a part of this study, and thanks also Auckland District Health Board for supporting me with study leave at various times.

I would like to acknowledge Tula Brannelly - my initial thesis supervisor, Catherine and Stacey for grist in the middle years, and Professor Annette Huntington for helping me to complete this project.

Thank you to Mary O’Hagan, the late Dimitri Germanov, Wilf Holt, the client Komiti at Auckland City Mission, and the Komiti Whakahaere of the New Zealand Coalition to End Homelessness, for invaluable consultation early on in this research process.

Thanks to friends and family for support and encouragement during the course of this project. Thanks especially to Mark T, Anna P, Piripi W for proof reading and positivity.

Thanks to Andrew Thompson for supportive and inquiring practice supervision.
And to Clive & Humphry and those others who know (that nobody owns the moon).

Lastly, much gratitude goes to George and Bell. George, for allowing me the time to undertake this work and helping me immeasurably along the way. And Bell, who was not yet born when I began this project but who has since drenched everything with more meaning, colour and happiness than I thought possible.

She stares
over my left shoulder
into blank corners
and seems to watch
who knows what
bright travellers.

Fiona Benson (2014)
Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................................... iv

Chapter 1 - Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 3

The researcher’s interest in the research topic .................................................................................. 4
The significance of the study ............................................................................................................. 5
The research questions and aims of this study ............................................................................... 6
The research questions: ...................................................................................................................... 6
The structure of the thesis: .................................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 2 - Background: Homelessness and mental health ........................................................... 8

Chapter 3 - Literature review: Nursing engagement for a hard-to-reach population .................. 13

Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 25

Chapter 4 - Research design and method ......................................................................................... 26

Methodology ...................................................................................................................................... 27

A qualitative approach .................................................................................................................... 27

Method: Identifying themes ............................................................................................................ 29

Research rigour .................................................................................................................................. 30

Reflexivity ......................................................................................................................................... 32

Participant recruitment ................................................................................................................... 32

The participants ................................................................................................................................ 33

Data collection .................................................................................................................................. 33

Ethical considerations .................................................................................................................... 34

Data analysis ..................................................................................................................................... 36

Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 37

Chapter 5 - Findings: Valuing relationships, working with uncertainty ......................................... 38

Valuing the relationship ................................................................................................................... 39

Relational selves ............................................................................................................................. 40

Engagement as a nursing intervention ............................................................................................ 44

Relationship difficulties .................................................................................................................. 53

Working with uncertainty ................................................................................................................. 57

Ambiguous work ............................................................................................................................ 57

Documenting uncertainty ............................................................................................................... 60

Uncertain selves .............................................................................................................................. 62
Chapter 6 - Discussion ........................................................................................................... 67
   Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 67
   The relational work of nurses ......................................................................................... 69
   Relational recovery ........................................................................................................ 70
   The human-professional confluence ............................................................................. 71
   The absent but implicit .................................................................................................. 73
   Rolling narratives ......................................................................................................... 75
   Recommendations ........................................................................................................ 76
   Limitations .................................................................................................................... 77
Chapter 7 - Conclusions .................................................................................................. 78
   References ..................................................................................................................... 80
   Appendix A: MUHEC ethics application approval ......................................................... 92
   Appendix B: Participant recruitment advertisement .................................................. 100
   Appendix C: Participant information sheet ................................................................. 101
   Appendix D: Authority for the release of transcripts ................................................... 103
   Appendix E: Semi-structured interview questions ....................................................... 104
   Appendix F: Participant consent form ....................................................................... 106