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A qualitative exploration of emotional competence and its relevance to nursing relationships

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Stacey Caroline Wilson

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Abstract

This qualitative research project explored the experiences of nurse educators who sought to assess aspects, which could be related to facilitation of emotional competence, in nursing students. Focus groups were conducted in three different educational institutions, offering a Bachelor of nursing degree. Each of the participants had a teaching and assessment role within the school of nursing. The contributions of the nurse educators and their interactions were audio taped, transcribed and then later, analysed using thematic and focus group analysis practices.

From the analysis of the experiences of the nurse educators, four predominant themes arose which capture the areas of importance to the participants. Student nurses can develop emotional competence by critically reflecting during classroom and clinical experiences. Continuous consideration must be made within each practicing area of nursing, of the environmental and relational challenges which inhibit or facilitate nurse's ability to practice with emotional competence. Educators and practicing nurses, who work alongside students, must uphold the expectation that emotional competence is a requisite ability and provide opportunities to foster emotional growth and skills to resolve conflict within the culture of nursing.

A common view shared by the educators was that the profession of nursing needs to have a clear understanding of what constitutes emotional competence. Strategies to realistically incorporate emotional competence into the educational curriculum and competency based assessment opportunities within nursing education are required.

Suggestions are presented from which undergraduate nursing education can facilitate development of emotional competence with those students working toward becoming a registered nurse. Emotional competence is suggested as an essential learning outcome in the movement toward transformative nursing education and a collaborative nursing profession.

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