DYING TO KNOW:
A Qualitative Study Exploring Nurses' Education in Caring for the Dying

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored how Registered Nurses with experience of caring for the dying share their knowledge and skills with new graduate nurses in the clinical setting.

The Research Questions were: What clinical knowledge/skills do ‘expert’ Registered Nurses possess that allow them to care competently and confidently for patients in their final forty-eight hours of life? How might these experienced nurses most effectively share their knowledge/skills with new graduate nurses in the clinical setting? The aims of the study were, firstly to describe the clinical experiences of Registered Nurses with expertise in care of the dying in a variety of practice settings. Secondly, to develop a written document whereby experienced nurses can share their knowledge/skills of care of the dying with new graduate nurses (as a supplement to the findings of this study).

The data was collected in terms of demographic information, and a single semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. Each participant was also asked to complete a written clinical narrative. The data was analysed using Luborsky’s method of thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were read and reread and similar topics were grouped as phrases and coded as themes. The major themes were described in detail using excerpts from the interviews and narratives of the participants. Clinical stories of practice shared by the participants in their interviews are included with the clinical narratives in the Resource Document.

There was a strong emphasis in the findings of this study on one-to-one sharing between the experienced and new graduate nurse throughout the dying process. The sharing was in the hands-on care provided, stories of experience and reflection on the care given. The concept of ‘care pairs’, the use of resource nurses and the resource document discussed in the recommendations could be used in a variety of clinical settings.
I would like to thank the following people for the support, guidance and supervision I have received throughout the course of this Thesis work.

Firstly, many thanks to the nine Registered Nurse participants, Mic, Lou, Phil, Pat, Kim, Rob, Lyn, Chris and Sam for their willingness to share their stories with me. The issues surrounding caring for patients who are dying can be very personal and emotional for the nurse. I appreciate the honesty and the time the participants have given to this study. It is my hope that the sharing of their stories of care and experience by these experienced nurses will assist new graduate nurses to be better prepared and supported as they care for their patients and the families.

I am extremely grateful to my Research Supervisors, Alison Viskovic and Michelle Knight for their availability, guidance, support and encouragement throughout the past two years. It was their attention to detail that made the process a smooth one.

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I wish to acknowledge the support and patience of my family, particularly my husband, Allen. Finally I wish to acknowledge the inspiration provided by my parents to enable me to complete this work, particularly my father, Barry, who passed away suddenly in May 2002. Nurses call on both professional and personal experiences as they care for patients who are dying and their families.
# CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ii  
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** iii  

**CHAPTER ONE:**
**INTRODUCTION**
1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1  
1.2 JUSTIFICATION/SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY 4  
1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS 5  

**CHAPTER TWO:**
**A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**
2.1 INTRODUCTION 6  
2.2 SETTING THE SCENE 7  
2.2.1 The Attitudes of Western Society to Death 8  
2.2.2 The Attitudes of Nurses to Death 9  
2.3 THE NURSE AS NOVICE, THE NURSE AS EXPERT 9  
2.3.1 Novices and Experts 10  
2.3.2 Articulating the Theoretical and the Practical Knowledge 11  
2.4 WHEN AND WHERE DYING OCCURS 11  
2.4.1 When does a Person Cross the Boundary from being Terminally Ill to Entering the Active Dying Phase? 11  
2.4.2 The Clinical Settings in which Care of the Dying takes place 12  
2.5 NURSES' EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION FOR CARE OF THE DYING 13  
2.5.1 The Adequacy of Educational Preparation of Health Professionals to Care for the Dying 13  
2.5.2 The Place of Continuing Education 14  
2.6 THE CURRICULUM RELATED TO CLASSROOM LEARNING 17  
2.6.1 An Integrated Approach Throughout the Curriculum or an Elected Course? 17  
2.6.2 The Focus of Teaching 17  
2.6.3 The Educational Format – Active (Experiential) or Passive (Didactic) Participants? 18  
2.6.4 Care of the Dying in the Clinical Area 19  
2.7 THE NEW ZEALAND SCENE 27  
2.7.1 Care of the Dying in Nursing Education in New Zealand 27  
2.7.2 Possibilities for the Future 27  
2.8 SUMMARY 30
CHAPTER THREE:
METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.2 THE METHODOLOGY
3.2.1 The Qualitative Approach

3.3 THE METHOD: PLANNING THE STUDY
3.3.1 Background
3.3.2 Ethical Issues
3.3.3 Approaching the Ethics Committees

3.4 HOW THE STUDY WAS IMPLEMENTED
3.4.1 The Selection Criteria
3.4.2 Advertising the Study
3.4.3 Signing up Participants for the Study
3.4.4 The Sample
3.4.5 Data Gathering
3.4.6 Data Analysis/Interpretation
3.4.7 Issues of Reliability/Validity
3.4.8 Presentation of the Data

3.5 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
3.5.1 The Strengths
3.5.2 The Limitations

3.6 FURTHER AREAS FOR RESEARCH

3.7 SUMMARY

CHAPTER FOUR:
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION
4.1.1 The Participants

4.2 RECOGNISING THE DYING STAGE
4.2.1 Holistic Recognition and Observation
4.2.2 Intuition

4.3 ROLE MODELS: WATCHING, REFLECTING
4.3.1 The Impact of Role Models
4.3.2 Observing Experience in Action
4.3.3 Reflecting on: What Worked Well...Or Didn’t

4.4 WORKING ALONGSIDE
4.4.1 Sharing the Stories of Clinical Experience
4.4.2 Working Alongside – One-to-One – Experienced and Novice

4.5 CLINICAL SUPERVISION AND EDUCATION
Copy of letter advertising the study
Information Sheet
Consent Form
Guidelines for interview (questions) and written clinical narrative
Transcriber’s Agreement

APPENDIX C – SAMPLE COLOUR CODED PAGE

REFERENCES