OPTIMISING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE:
THE LIVED WORLD OF NURSING THE FAMILIES OF
PEOPLE WHO DIE IN INTENSIVE CARE

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Intensive Care nurses share some of the most precious and poignant moments with people who have family members dying in ICU. This study explores the lifeworld of seven ICU nurses who describe their experiences working with these families. Data was gathered using unstructured, indepth, face-to-face interviews. These were tape-recorded and transcribed. The study uses a phenomenological approach informed by Heidegger and hermeneutics. Van Manen’s methodological suggestions are followed to shape and focus the study, and provide guidelines for analysis of the data and the writing of the report. The findings reveal that ICU nurses recognise that this is a particularly tragic and difficult time in peoples’ lives. The nurses are aware that the last hours or days with a dying relative may be vividly remembered for years to come. During this time nurses seek to optimise the human experience of the family members by making the time as positive, or best, as possible. This is achieved through strategies such as Being There, Supporting, Sharing, Involving, Interpreting and Advocating. These strategies are enabled by three domains: Nurse as Person, Nurse as Practitioner and Nurse as Colleague which describe a wider context to working effectively with families rather than merely looking at direct interactions between the nurse and the family. Optimising the Human Experience is proposed as the central essence or phenomenon of nursing the families of people who die in ICU.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ........................................................................................... v
List of Tables .................................................................................................... ix
List of Figures .................................................................................................. x
Key to Abbreviations ....................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION ................................................................ 1
  OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY ......................................................................... 2
  BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY ..................................................................... 3
  STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS ....................................................................... 4
  SUMMARY ..................................................................................................... 6

CHAPTER TWO – SETTING THE SCENE: NURSING IN
THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT ........................................................................ 7
  THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT ....................................................................... 8
  WORKING IN ICU .......................................................................................... 10
  DEATH AND DYING IN ICU ....................................................................... 12
  SUMMARY ..................................................................................................... 14

CHAPTER THREE – PHENOMENOLOGY: PHILOSOPHY
AND METHOD ............................................................................................... 15
  PHENOMENOLOGY: THE PHILOSOPHY .................................................. 15
  HISTORY OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL MOVEMENT .................. 15
  HEIDEGGERIAN PHENOMENOLOGY ....................................................... 18
OPTIMISING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE:

SITUATING THE PHENOMENON

Being Human

In-Betweeness to Optimise the Human Experience

Skilled Companionship in Optimising the Human Experience

PRESENTATION OF STRATEGIES THAT OPTIMISE THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER SIX – KEY STRATEGIES TO OPTIMISE THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

BEING THERE

SHARING

SUPPORTING

INVOLVING

INTERPRETING

ADVOCATING

CHAPTER SEVEN – NURSE AS PERSON

GIVING

GRIEVING

BALANCING

CHAPTER EIGHT – NURSE AS PRACTITIONER
LIST OF TABLES

Table One - Optimising the Human Experience: Key Strategies ..... 75

Table Two – Domain – Nurse as Person............................................. 100

Table Three – Domain – Nurse as Practitioner ............................. 116

Table Four – Domain – Nurse as Colleague...................................... 128
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure One – A Schematic Representation of Nursing the
Family of a Dying Person in ICU .............................................. 66
KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in this thesis when material has been used from transcriptions of participants' interviews:

... 
Pause

..//.. 
Material edited out of transcript

(round bracket) 
Researcher's comments or questions

[square bracket] 
Clarifying or explanatory comment