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MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

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THE LIVED WORLD OF NURSING PRACTICE

IN AN ACUTE CARE SETTING

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Nursing at Massey
University

Bronwyn Paterson

1989

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the practice world of twenty two registered nurses working in medical and surgical wards of an acute general hospital in New Zealand. It is argued that nursing practice is a complex, context-specific, activity and needs to be studied using methods that do not assume an objective, context-free reality.

The work of Patricia Benner (1984) guided this study which utilised a qualitative research approach to enter the lived world of nursing practice. Through descriptions of work days and a sharing of clinical exemplars, an understanding of the broader context of nursing practice was gained, areas of skilled performance in nursing emerged, and the meaning of making a difference for the nurses in the study examined. The central role of mutual advice and support in facilitating significant incidents in practice was apparent.

An examination of the types of experiences which challenge current practice and change it in some way provided insight into the importance of experience in developing clinical expertise and the vital role of local knowledge in facilitating practice. Nursing practice emerged as crucial to patient welfare and safety in the acute care setting.

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A research study of this nature and magnitude can never be completed in isolation and I would like to express my sincere thanks to all those people without whose contributions this thesis would never have become a reality.

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