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**An Exploration of the Nature of Therapeutic Nursing in
a General Rehabilitation Team**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Abstract

The role of the nurse in the rehabilitation specialty has been defined in terms of the tasks and functions which nurses perform. Whilst the therapeutic contribution of other disciplines is more clearly understood, the extent to which nursing activities are therapeutic is not clear. Therapy is defined as activity which brings about healing or an improved outcome for the customer and is arguably the *raison d'être* of the rehabilitation specialty.

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of therapeutic nursing in a rehabilitation context from the perspective of the nurse and the customer. The purpose was not to explore **all** aspects of nursing activity. This was neither within the scope of the study nor necessarily consistent with the research question.

The aim was to make more transparent to nurses and to their colleagues just what constitutes the therapeutic work of nursing in rehabilitation, enabling nurses to focus specifically on activity which is of a therapeutic nature and consequently offer nursing which is specifically rehabilitative.

The investigator was the Team Leader of a General Rehabilitation Team in a rehabilitation unit located in a major city in New Zealand. The study design used the Focus Group method to collect data from nurse participants in the team. Thematic analysis applied to the data generated nurse-validated categories of therapeutic activity. Also, during the study discharged customer participants were invited to answer a questionnaire about their perceptions of the nature of therapeutic nursing activity. The responses facilitated a comparison between nurse and customer perceptions of therapeutic nursing. Major themes were extracted from the data and there was congruency between nurse and customer data. Together these themes created a profile of the nurse as a coach. This role constitutes a leadership role in the team, with the customer and with the family. Coaching activity supports the

customer through the rehabilitation programme, assists in overcoming barriers to progress and creates opportunities to develop independence.

A new model for rehabilitation nursing practice is proposed, and recommendations for practice, research and education are described.

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This study is dedicated to my husband whose patience and love made the solitary business of study possible, and to nurses in the General Rehab Team who provide coaching, often in the face of many difficulties.

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Psalm 18:6

Table of Contents

	Page Number
Abstract	ii-iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v-vii
List of Tables and Figures	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1-7
Chapter Two: Literature Review	8-31
Role of the nurse in rehabilitation	8-11
Defining therapeutics and healing	11-12
Conceptual models of therapeutic nursing	12-16
Primary nursing	16-18
Case management	19
Therapeutic relationships	19-21
Caring as therapy	21-23
Classification of therapeutic nursing practice	23-27
Testing nursing interventions and research-based practice	27-28
Therapeutic touch and non-traditional therapies in nursing	28-30
Chapter Three: Method and Study Design	32-61
Part One: Focus group method	32-51
Focus group method	32-35
Validity, reliability and trustworthiness in focus group method	35-37
Methodological strengths and limitations	38-39
Application of the method	39-44
Data recording	45

Data analysis	45-49
Comparison with other methods	49-51
Part Two: Focus group method and the therapeutic nursing study	53-62
The study	53-58
Data recording and transcription	58
Data analysis	58-59
Reporting the data	59-60
Customer feedback	60-61
Chapter Four: Data analysis	62-108
Part One: Focus group data	63-93
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the team	66
Smooth Operations	67-69
Welcome to the team	70-72
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the individual	73
Paying attention to people	74-80
Enabling others to act	80-84
Bringing out the best	85-90
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the family	91
Making room for others to contribute	92-93
Sponsoring	93
Part Two: Customer data analysis	94-108
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the team	96
Welcome to the team	96
Smooth Operations	96-98
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the individual	99
Paying attention to people	100-102
Enabling others to act	103-104
Bringing out the best	104-105
Summary	106-108

Chapter Five: Discussion	109-148
Study design and method: strengths and limitations	110-112
Trustworthiness, validity and reliability	112-115
Discussion of findings	116-134
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the team	
Teamwork	117-118
Nursing leadership	118-119
Collaboration	119-120
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the individual	121-122
Trust, control, self-awareness and respect for the individual	122-130
Coaching: face-to-face leadership with the family	131-134
Summary	135-143
Leadership and management: the nurse: coach	136-139
Coaching in the sports context	139-140
Teaching: the nurse: coach	140-142
Relationship: the nurse:coach	142-143
Development of a model of therapeutic nursing practice in the rehabilitation specialty	144-148
Chapter Six: Study findings and conceptual models	149-154
Chapter Seven: Conclusion	155-158
Implications for practice, education and further research	157-158
Appendices	159-175
References	176-182

List of Tables

Table 1:1	Tasks and functions of the nurse in the rehabilitation setting	9
Table 1:2	Healing or caretaking - which will it be?	14-15
Table 4:1	Summary of categories from nursing focus group data	65
Table 4:2	Summary of categories from customer questionnaire data	95
Table 5:1	Coaching: face-to-face with the individual. Nurse and customer categories	121
Table 5:2	Family: nursing and customer categories	131
Table 5:3	Role of the coach in relation to performance and relationship	135
Table 5:4	Role of the coach in relation to performance and relationship (the study)	135

List of Figures

Figure 5:1	The Nurse:Coach Model: Face-to-face Leadership	145
Figure 5:2	Essential constituents of the nurse:coach role	146