

Abstract

“GENERAL NURSES’ PERCEPTIONS OF CARING FOR PATIENTS SUFFERING FROM DEMENTIA”

This qualitative study focused on general nurses’ perceptions towards people suffering from dementia. It aimed to explore and investigate the perceptions, experience and understanding of general nurses and to identify environmental factors that nurses believe are influential on the care provision of these patients in acute medical wards.

Face to face semi-structured interviews were used. The author used an interview guide which she devised herself after a review of the literature and upon discussion with her academic supervisor. The convenience sample consisted of ten nurses with a minimum of three years experience. Two of them were used for the pilot interviews; however, their responses were used as part of the data. All the nurses approached, agreed to participate in the study. The data collected was audio taped; transcribed and thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

Four main themes emerged from the data, namely: ‘feelings of stress and frustration’, ‘environmental barriers’, ‘coping with challenging behaviour’ and ‘gaps in knowledge’.

Main conclusions of the study were that nurses try to deliver optimal care to dementia sufferers despite being impeded by communication barriers, challenging behaviour, environmental obstacles, time constraints and lack of knowledge.

Recommendations include: Dementia education for nursing students and qualified nurses, better nurse-patient ratio, patient allocation system as opposed to the task allocation system employed on medical wards, the establishment of a dementia unit for dementia sufferers

requiring acute medical care, the possibility for familiar persons to accompany the patient throughout hospitalisation on an acute medical ward. Other recommendations for further research on the subject have been made.