



The meaning of emotion work to student nurses: A Heideggerian analysis



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ABSTRACT

Background: Providing patients with emotional support can be challenging to student nurses, as it is seen as a less tangible aspect of care when compared to other acts of caring. **Objectives:** The underpinning objective of this study was to explore the meaning of emotional relationships between pre-registration nursing students and patients admitted to a clinical setting in the United Kingdom.

Design: Using an interpretive phenomenological approach data were collected using in depth unstructured interviews, with nine purposively recruited pre-registration student nurses at a University in the United Kingdom.

Results: The structure of emotion work for these nurses, was found to consist of three constituents; (a) the need for an emotional “balance;” (b) feeling the need to cry; (c) feeling the need to talk. We portray this phenomenon as “emotional nurse being” using Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology.

Conclusions: The insights gained from this study could be used to understand and support pre-registration student nurses in this aspect of their practice.

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What is already known about the topic?

- Nursing care, within a holistic approach is seen to include at its centre emotion work; a concept that has been explored regularly over the last fifty years, but one whose meaning in practice has proved elusive.
- Providing emotional support for patients and their relatives is a challenge to student nurses, as it is seen as a less tangible aspect of care when compared to other acts of caring.
- For student nurses on placement a focus on competencies detracts from their learning how to cope with the emotional aspects of the care they are providing.

What this paper adds

- There is a need for student nurses to be able to discuss, at an appropriate time, emotionally challenging issues with someone who will listen and be receptive to their feelings.
- Student nurses reported that they found the influence of other nurses, on their emotional coping whilst on placement, to be negligible or largely negative.
- The findings draw attention to the importance of providing student nurses with effective role models whose emotional coping style they can emulate.

The meaning of emotion work to nurses has been explored over the past fifty years (Dartington, 1994; Mackintosh, 2006; Menzies, 1960; Smith, 1992), although the hidden nature of emotion can make it a difficult concept to explain. The concept of, emotional labour, described as the induction or suppression of feelings for the benefit of others (Hochschild, 1983) and emotional

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intelligence, described as the ability to perceive, integrate, understand and manage emotions, to promote personal development (Mayer and Salovey, 1993), has helped to clarify this aspect of practice, informing research in the nursing press over relatively recent years (for example, McQueen, 2004; Smith, 1992).

In comparison to the physical aspects of care delivery, the emotional nature of nursing has received little attention and a task orientated approach to care prevails (Williams, 2013). This has particular implications for student nurses as the socialisation process into nursing has been shown to have a negative effect on their emotions (Mackintosh, 2006; Menzies, 1960; Smith, 1992). The reality of the nursing programme can invoke negative feelings which might lead to attrition, and discontinuers often leave for non-academic reasons (Andrew et al., 2008). However an education which ignores the development of the emotions ignores what lies at the heart of nursing practice (Freshwater and Stickley, 2004). By placing significance on the nursing student's emotions, the educator is conveying the significance of emotion in the interpersonal relationships the student encounters in practice (Mc Andrew and Warne, 2010).

A holistic approach to nursing care places emotion work central to the nurse/patient relationship, and is viewed as an important feature in the pursuit of "new nursing." "New nursing", the potentially therapeutic nature of nurses' interpersonal involvement with patients, can yield benefits for nurses and patients alike (Hunter and Smith, 2007), although a more relational approach, even though more rewarding to both parties, can be challenging to the nurse (Bridges and Meyer, 2007).

Research on emotion work in nursing practice has offered valuable insights into ways in which student nurses manage their own and others emotions (Mackintosh, 2006; Smith, 1992) although further research into the complexity of the phenomenon is warranted. The work is particularly relevant as nursing becomes an all-graduate profession in the United Kingdom (UK) amidst concerns among the public that this will lead to a less compassionate and caring ethos (Gallagher, 2013).

This article aims to explore the nuances of emotion work in student nurse practice and will serve as a basis to inform the nature of support required. This work will be of relevance to those involved in supporting pre registration student nurses in the emotional aspects of their practice.

The following research began with a supposition that nursing students found emotion work a challenging aspect of practice. However, the challenges faced could be met if certain needs were considered. In clarifying the needs, a new finding was revealed which we describe as "emotional nurse being." This term is used to describe the lifeworld of the nursing student, and is underpinned by Heideggerian philosophy, some of which will be explored in this paper.

1. Research question

The aim of this study was to explore the meaning of emotional relationships between pre-registration nursing students and patients admitted to a clinical setting in the United Kingdom. The central research question was; what

is the meaning of emotion work for student nurses involved in the care of another? The question required more than just a description of experience, and sought the meaning of emotional being. Heidegger's ontological question related to the meaning of being, and the term "emotional nurse being" was developed through reading his work, most notably his description of "Dasein" or "Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1926/1962). This Heideggerian idea asserts that humans and the world exist as one, they are an inseparable entity, and the term lifeworld is used to depict the unity between the person and the world. This person/world existence occurs on different levels. During the research process, the researcher becomes part of the lifeworld of the other, and understanding is reached through this process. The nursing students in this study enter the lifeworld of the patients for whom they care, and their own understanding of emotional being takes place during this process.

1.1. Approach

Phenomenology is described as an approach, rather than a method, of undertaking research (Dahlberg, 2006). Heidegger did not provide a research method, although he suggested a way of thinking about the world.

Heideggerian research is described as hermeneutical or interpretive, based on the belief that there is no such thing as an un-interpreted thought (Heidegger, 1926/1962). Rather than use bracketing to promote validity, Heidegger introduces the notion of the hermeneutic circle, which values our pre understanding of situations, and ourselves as already in the world. Dahlberg et al. (2008, p. 236) describes this style of research process in terms of "the whole-the parts-the whole" and understanding becomes infinite as further information is revealed. The researcher moves from the whole of the initial understanding, to parts of the transcript or text, and then back to a different understanding of the issues.

From a research perspective, our own experiences and beliefs add to our interpretation of the data, which can be described as "co-constitution" (Koch, 1996, p. 176). Unless the researcher's perspective is included, the reader cannot ascertain the influences on the interpretation. Such methods assist in the process of "research openness" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 445).

Champlin (2009, p. 1527) completed an interview with a colleague familiar with phenomenology to reveal her "presuppositions related to the phenomenon being investigated" and this process was replicated in this study, using an adapted version of the questions considered by Champlin (2009). The questions included: What is it that has made you so interested in the subject of emotional being in nursing? What do you think it is like for pre-registration nursing students to experience emotional being? Do you think they will find the conversation emotionally challenging?

As the primary researcher, I (KJ) used this schedule to produce written responses and discussed the answers with the co-researcher (CW). My thoughts and expectations in relation to the study were then exposed and articulated through this process. My interest in this subject arises from

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