



Nurse faculty perceptions of end-of-life education in the clinical setting: A phenomenological perspective



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 27 March 2014

Keywords:

End-of-life education
Nursing faculty
Clinical
Qualitative

ABSTRACT

Background: Caring for patients at the end of life is an emotionally and physically challenging task. When patients approach the end of life, nurses are in a key position to enhance their quality of life by providing emotional support and physical symptom management. Patients and their families need nurses who are comfortable discussing various treatment options and levels of care. Therefore, it is essential that nurses receive both didactic and clinical education on end-of-life nursing care in their nursing curriculum, before entering the healthcare workforce.

Objectives: The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of nursing clinical instructors as they guide nursing students who care for dying patients in the clinical setting.

Design: The research design of this study was qualitative.

Setting: This study sought to explore the experiences of nursing clinical instructors; however, due to the busy nature of hospital nursing units, participants were interviewed in a private location on their university campus.

Participants: Ten full-time nursing faculty members participated in this study. The average time spent in a full time faculty position was 16.5 years.

Methods: A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data was analyzed utilizing Colaizzi's method of thematic analysis.

Results: Six major themes emerged from the data, which will be discussed and illustrated with participants' descriptions.

Conclusions: It was evident from this study that educating nursing students on care of a dying patient is not only important but essential to future nursing practice. Nurses who learn about end-of-life care from trusted nursing educators may enter the profession prepared to address patient's questions regarding end of life issues.

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Introduction

Nurses have a pivotal role in a person's end of life and nurses' knowledge, skills and attitude towards death and dying and end-of-life care affect the care that they provide for these patients (Dunn et al., 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that nurses receive education about end-of-life care in their pre-licensure curriculum so that they are prepared to care for dying patients. Clinical nursing faculties are in a position to enhance nursing students' learning about the dying process and how to care for patients in the clinical practicum. Understanding the experiences and perceptions of

clinical nursing faculty staff members about end-of-life care would provide further knowledge and awareness about the experience of teaching end-of-life content to nursing students in the clinical setting. This in turn may lead to the development of strategies to improve the way end-of-life care is taught.

Background

Despite the recent advances in medicine, several studies demonstrated that end-of-life care is lacking in hospital settings (Al-Quraiby et al., 2009; Foley, 2005). In addition, the American population is aging rapidly. The United States Census Bureau (2008) states that "...the 85 and older population is expected to more than triple, from 5.4 million to 19 million..." by the year 2030. This growing population is coupled with the fact that

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people are living longer with chronic diseases due to the rapid expansion of technology and improved medications. Yet, despite these advances, people with multiple co-morbidities will experience a decline in health and will require end-of-life care. Nurses are at the bedside in various clinical specialties caring for patients at end of life (McClement et al., 2005). However, researchers have shown that registered nurses often display anxiety about death and the dying process and lack adequate knowledge about care of the dying (Weigel et al., 2007; Zomorodi and Lynn, 2010). Therefore, it should be important to include end-of-life care education in pre-licensure nursing education. Although studies reported that end-of-life care education in nursing programs are increasing, the courses or content necessary to equip future nurses with the knowledge, understanding, and ability to provide adequate end-of-life care are still limited (Coolican et al., 1994; Lloyd-Williams and Field, 2002; Robinson, 2009). Some studies have been conducted examining student learning and end-of-life care. After a didactic educational intervention on end-of-life care, students demonstrated improvement in their knowledge and attitude towards care for dying patients (Barrere et al., 2008; Hamilton, 2010). Yet, literature examining method and effectiveness of clinical teaching is scarce. Because nursing is a practice discipline, clinical education should be regarded as equally as important as didactic education (Chan, 2002; Lambert and Glacken, 2005). Such end-of-life topics as pain management, prognosis, and quality of life are currently at the forefront of health care, in the United States. Nurses and other health care professionals must be competent in addressing these issues that arise at the end of a patient's life. Clinical education on end-of-life concepts and issues must be explored to further understand the experience from the nursing educators' perspective.

Purpose

The aim of this study was to understand the lived experience of nursing clinical instructors as they teach undergraduate nursing students about end-of-life issues in the clinical setting. The main research question guiding this study was: What is the experience of nursing clinical instructors as they support nursing students who are caring for dying patients and their families in the clinical setting?

Design

The research design of this study was qualitative, interpretive phenomenology, including hermeneutical analysis of data. Qualitative research design is preferred when there is little known about a phenomenon and the researcher is interested in studying a phenomenon in its natural setting, gaining further knowledge of the participants' point of view (Morse and Field, 1995). Utilizing phenomenology with an interpretive approach, researchers "...focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The purpose of this type of research is to interpret individuals' meanings and significance of their world (Creswell, 2007).

Prior to conducting this study, Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the researcher's university. Participants in this study were provided with a letter of explanation detailing the purpose of the study as well as implications for nursing practice, nursing education and nursing research. Informed consent was obtained from each participant in the study.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used and full time nursing faculty from baccalaureate nursing programs in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States who taught and specialized in adult or pediatric acute care, home care, or hospice clinical settings, were recruited for this study.

Setting

This study sought to explore the experiences of nursing clinical instructors; however, due to the busy nature of hospital nursing units, participants were interviewed in a private location on their university campus. The location of the interviews included the participant's office or designated meeting room.

Data collection

Participants were interviewed and audio recorded by the researcher for approximately 30 min. The interview was semi-structured with open-ended questions geared toward eliciting responses that pertained to the participants' experiences with teaching end-of-life content to nursing students in the clinical setting. The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) method of thematic analysis. Transcripts were read and re-read by the researcher. Significant statements were extracted and meanings were formulated to describe participant experiences. Themes emerged and were clustered, followed by a written exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Once the transcripts were read and thematic analysis was performed, the researcher provided each participant with their individual analysis to validate the data. This is done in order to determine that the researcher has accurately described participants' experiences and to verify the information presented in the analysis (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness of the study was maintained utilizing credibility, applicability, consistency and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Member checking was done in order to maintain credibility. The participants reviewed their transcript and initial analysis to determine accuracy. No data related to participants experiences changed following verification.

To achieve consistency or transferability, the researcher must clearly state the research design and methodology, so that the study could be replicated (Van Rooyen et al., 2005). In addition, a clearly written audit trail must be followed (Sandelowski, 1986). The audit trail included field notes that described the researcher's decision making during the study as well as how the researcher interpreted the data based on the written notes, audio files and transcripts (Morse and Field, 1995). A doctorally prepared nurse researcher who has expertise in qualitative research reviewed the audit trail. To maintain confirmability, the researcher identified her own assumptions regarding end-of-life nursing care and education prior to the study.

Results

Ten full-time nursing faculty members participated in this study. All participants were female and Caucasian, and their average age was 55 years. Seven participants held a Doctor of Philosophy degree and 3 held a Master's of Science in Nursing degree. Their years of experience in teaching varied between 1 and 35 years.

The researcher extracted a total of 113 significant statements related to the phenomenon. These statements were then clustered into groups with formulated meanings. Six major themes emerged

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