



Education issues

Learning from narrative to understand the person-centred experience in neonatal nursing: A literature review



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Available online 7 September 2016

KEYWORDS

Narrative;
Neonatal nursing;
Understanding experience;
Person-centred learning

Abstract *Introduction:* Within healthcare, narrative can be a compelling way to teach professionals about patient experience and foster a more humanistic, person-centred understanding of care. The neonatal nursing field is a speciality with specific learning needs relating to the neonate within the family centred context that requires a person-centred understanding of the parent experience. Little has been investigated or written about how narrative can inform teaching and learning about person-centred care in this area.

Objectives: To identify key literature that explores the narratives of parents or nurses with a view to evaluating their value for enhancing learning about person-centred nursing care in the neonatal field.

Design: A literature review was undertaken focussing on qualitative research exploring parent's or nurse's experience through narrative and learning from that experience within neonatal care.

Data sources: The databases identified as most suitable to their relevance to nursing were accessed through EBSCO host and a local University consolidated library search system.

Review methods: Primary, Boolean and advanced searches on key terms were performed. Purposive sampling of the literature was used and inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. A final selection of nine studies was put forward for review.

Findings: Analysis of the selected literature found that attention to the narratives of both parents and nurses in the neonatal field revealed important insights into the lived experiences of this often challenging environment. This offers opportunities to open up professional practice for discussion providing an effective vehicle for students and nurses to learn about and discuss these experiences in the neonatal field. This in turn can offer a more compassionate, person-centred approach to the care of neonates, parents and staff in this area.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jnn.2016.08.005>

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Conclusion: There is a place for the integration of narrative in the form of storytelling into teaching and learning strategies that capture the experience of those within the neonatal field that can be used to support education about person-centred neonatal nursing care.

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Introduction

The central focus of this literature review and subsequent analysis is learning about the human experience from narrative within nursing practice, to apply to the field of neonatal care. More specifically, it asks what narrative reveals about the experiences of both patients and nurses in order for others to learn from and understand them, specifically in relation to a person-centred approach to neonatal nursing care. Person-centred care, defined as that involving compassion, empathy and respect, are the essential foundations of nursing care. Such a humanistic approach places the person as the central focal point of attention. In other words, there is a link between narrative and the exploration of stories to enable a deeper understanding of this individual, human experience (Andrews et al., 2013) which is said to lead to more compassionate, empathic and person-centred nursing care (Charon, 2006).

Narrative is defined as a spoken or written account of events or experience. Indeed, this definition can also include 'story' which is defined as a series of connected events that takes the reader with them and comprises a start, a main body and usually a conclusion or end point, whether true or fictitious (Wright et al., 2014). By this, a narrative can be a story but not necessarily. However, a story is a type of narrative. For the purposes of this review, the terms will be used interchangeably. To add, within neonatal care, 'patient' refers to that of the *parent's* experience since we cannot explore the narratives of the neonate themselves.

The majority of literature in the area of narrative healthcare is placed within the adult field; less so in children's and neonatal care which presents an evidence gap. The current review however aims to harness key messages from a selection of key literature and focuses on how we can use the narratives of health professionals and patients to explain and enhance a person-centred understanding within the neonatal field specifically. This review of the literature therefore identifies and analyses key papers relevant to the

question; *what can be learnt about the patient experience from narrative to enhance understanding of a person-centred approach to neonatal nursing care?*

Background

The theoretical background to the use of narrative can be explained by Bruner's (1991) 'narrative construction of reality' who believes that we organise our experience and memory of what happens to us mainly in the form of narratives – i.e., stories. Narratives are an individual version of reality and are at the heart of all 'meaning-making'. Here, there lies a place for narrative within a constructivist theoretical framework whereby individuals learn and experience the world through 'storied' lives that are *constructed* within an individual context. The psychologist, Polkinghorne (1988) also focuses on the concept of *meaning* and defines narrative as a story that relates a series of events by which we learn about the world. He refers to this as 'narrative knowing' and views stories as being a fundamental tool to explore human science, both theorists believing that narratives have a special and powerful explanatory potential.

In the context of healthcare, a story is defined therefore as a unique human experience through which patients find meaning in their past or present experience, express emotions and connect and relate to other people (Christiansen, 2011; Hardy and Haigh, 2011) during their healthcare encounter. Stories are regarded as a powerful way to show professionals human experience and encourage sensitive, individualised, compassionate care within the remit of narrative healthcare (Charon, 2006; Hardy, 2007; Stacey and Hardy, 2011).

DasGupta (2007) believes that illness narratives from children and their families hold 'unique insights' in how to 'engage in an ethical, empathetic and self-reflective practice' (pg. 1384).

A common and general conclusion drawn from the literature is that narrative in the form of stories

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