

Fine-tuning knowledge as part of professional knowing of nurses to provide individual tailored nursing care.

Ria den Hertog PhD

Education and Learning in nursing practice

Background

In the paradigm of Evidence Based Practice the focus of nursing interventions is generally based on the evidence from scientific research, less attention is paid to professional expertise and patients' preferences. Since each patient is a unique individual, especially elderly with their own health experiences and history, it is important to tailor nursing care.

Introduction

Active involvement of patients in nursing decision-making reveals a higher level of intention to reach positive patient outcomes and demonstrates a strong influence on patient satisfaction. For a good nurse-patient relationship it is required that nurses in acute care can take account into patient preferences in nursing decision-making.

Aim

The general objective of this study was to develop a substantive theory of how good nurses in acute care tune in to patient preferences in their nursing decision-making, and what knowledge they deploy in doing so.

Materials and methods

A grounded theory study was conducted using interviews (n=27) and participant observation (n=7) in four hospitals in the Netherlands. Excellent nurses were selected by their peers, who qualified them as outstanding in nurse-patient contacts. Data were obtained and analysed in a process of constant comparison to find central concepts.

Results

In the exploration of the literature it appears that the operationalisation of patient preferences is strongly dependent on the espoused scientific tradition of the researcher. In both traditional ways, quantitative and qualitative, less information is found about how nurses attune to patient preferences in nursing decision-making. In the empirical research it is found that these excellent nurses use implicit and intuitive tools to make social connectedness by creating a 'click', use 'antennae' or probes, and communicate openly by asking 'empathic' questions. Based on the acquired knowledge about patients and their social system they make, often unconsciously, a broad frame of reference to optimize patients' participation in nursing care.

Conclusions

'Excellent' nurses in acute care succeed in taking account into patient preferences in their nursing decision-making because they possess fine-tuning knowledge with the use of implicit

and intuitive tools. They establish and maintain a positive nurse-patient relationship, wherein the patient's autonomy is optimal stimulated. Fine-tuning knowledge is a special part of professional knowledge to balance protocols, professional experience, and patient preferences in dialogue with the patient to tailor individual nursing care for elderly admitted in hospital. Further research is recommended to discover what these findings mean for nursing decision-making in practice and in nursing education.