Student Nurses' experience of caring for infectious patients in source isolation.

Cassidy, I.
School of Nursing, Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Limerick

Introduction

Caring for infectious patients in isolation poses not only opportunities for learning but also many challenges for nursing practice and the nurse patient relationship. To contribute to the preparation of student nurses for caring roles and ultimately registration as a general nurse, it is important to illuminate the issues central to their experiences of caring for isolated patients within the general hospital environment.

Objectives

Through methods grounded in the hermeneutic phenomenological approach the purpose of this study is to illuminate second year student nurses’ experience of caring for infectious patients in source isolation within the general hospital setting. “Caring” in this research may relate to the physical, psychological, social and / or spiritual aspects of caring from the lived experience of the student nurse.

Methodology

Eight student nurses in their second year of the undergraduate programme in general nursing were interviewed using an un-structured, open-ended and face-to-face interview approach to data collection. The thematic data analysis framework used within this research, allowed the researcher to become a co-participant within analysis and facilitated the process of understanding student nurses’ experience of caring for infectious patients in source isolation.

Results

Four themes emerged from the study.
These included:
• The Organisation: Caring in Context
• The Barriers and Breaking the Barriers
• Theory & Practice
• Only a Student.

Findings from this study provided insight into student nurses’ experiences of caring for infectious patients. Caring for infectious patients in source isolation is influenced by the context within which such caring is provided. The caring experience and the student nurse-patient relationship are dramatically altered by virtue of the uniqueness of the imposed physical, psychological, social and emotional barriers of isolation. Students were conscious of the "barriers" of isolation and the significance of “breaking the barriers” within their nursing care.

Conclusion

Balancing the care of isolated patients to meet their individual needs, while preventing the spread of infection has significant meaning for students and explicates the challenges of integrating the art and science of nursing. Finally, the application of theory to practice is vital for the personal and professional development of the student nurse and needs to be recognised and nurtured within the clinical area.