

13th National Rural Health Conference

Learning from final year nursing student stories of rural practice

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Let's start with a story....

A final year nursing student recalls events that occurred on clinical placements, and reflects on how these are meaningful for future practice as a Registered Nurse....

'I take note of the professional practice I have encountered, reflect on it and decide whether it fits in with what I have learnt and if it adheres to policies and procedures. If so, the professional practice will ultimately inform my future practice as a beginning level Registered Nurse, although, even if the professional practice I encounter is not professional and does not adhere to any applicable policies or procedures, it will still inform my future practice because I am learning what not to do'.

Now to backtrack.....

This study gathered final year nursing students' stories about placement experiences and asked them to reflect on what they learned.

275 narratives were collected online and thematically analysed

The aims of the project were twofold:

- To explore how telling stories and reflecting on their meaning might facilitate learning for future practice.
- To understand how students create meaning from their clinical learning experiences.

What we found....

- Most were stories of difficult or negative situations
- A few were about positive experiences and great role models
- The stories described a range of events and situations
- However the most striking finding was the tension between what the students had been taught about practice and the realities of practice.



Re-imagining practice....

The vast majority of the student stories included a 're-imagining' of the situation or event.

'I have decided to turn this negative experience into a positive one by reflecting on the incident and learning from this experience in a constructive way.'

'The two incidents influenced and informed my view not only on how nurses in general should deliver care but how I personally want to deliver care, how I would manage such situations, and the kind of nurse I would like to be.'

'Finally and most importantly, the main lesson I gained from these experiences, was that it highlighted who I am, not only as an individual, but also as a soon to be registered nurse. These experiences highlighted not only the type of nurse I want to be, but more importantly the type of nurse "I do not want to be",

What does this mean....

The findings led us to ask the question:

Are we preparing nursing students sufficiently well to cope with the messy, and sometime less than perfect realities of practice?

What are the implications if we are not?

So what.....

The powerful stories and reflections indicated that the students struggled with the dissonance between the ideals and the realities of practice.

Question.....

How can we (the nursing profession) use students' stories of clinical experiences to better understand how to support them to take their place as safe, competent and confident nurses?

(Suggested) Recommendation 1

- The outcomes of this study could inform a larger study of nursing students' reflections on rural clinical experiences as a means of identifying whether there are widespread tensions between the ideals and the realities of nursing practice

(Suggested) Recommendation 2

A collaboration of rural/regional universities and health services could drive a larger (funded?) project to explore students' clinical experiences more broadly.

(Suggested) Recommendation 3

The results of a larger study could be presented to workforce planners in rural healthcare workplaces to encourage discussion on how nurses manage the 'cognitive load' associated with supervising students on clinical placements.

Thank you

