EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF COMPASSION IN NURSING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Statement of the Problem
The concept of compassion is important to study in order for nurses to fully understand how to meet the expectations of today’s healthcare consumer for compassionate care (Graber & Mitcham, 2004; Nelson & Watson, 2012; Sulliman et al., 2009). The need for further study on the concept of compassion as a descriptor of nursing is identified in multiple studies (Cote, Pepin, Ricardo & D’Aoust, 2006; Davidson & Williams, 2009; Dunn, 2009a; Keit 2011; Schantz, 2007, and Von Dietze & Ord, 2000). Compassion should be more fully understood from the experienced nurse’s perspective (Schantz, 2007). An increased understanding of compassion and how it is demonstrated as compassionate caring in nursing will lead us to better insight into the profession of nursing, thus potentially improving nurses’ perception and descriptions of compassion (Dunn, 2009a; Kret 2011; Schantz, 2007, and Von Dietze & Ord, 2000). Compassion should be more fully understood from the experienced nurse’s perspective (Schantz, 2007). An increased understanding of compassion and how it is demonstrated as compassionate caring in nursing will lead us to better insight into the profession of nursing, thus potentially improving nurses’ perception and descriptions of compassion (Dunn, 2009a; Kret 2011; Schantz, 2007, and Von Dietze & Ord, 2000).

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the stories shared by registered nurses of their perceptions and descriptions of experiences providing compassionate care in their practice.

Significance of the Study
Schantz (2007) determined the term compassion was not clearly defined in nursing scholarship nor consistently demonstrated, or even considered in daily nursing practice. Perry (2009) identified the need for further research to determine how compassion is demonstrated in nursing practice in order to understand more fully how to educate and reinforce compassionate practice by nurses. The concept of compassion as the main trait of nursing validates that nurses must fully understand compassion in order to decrease compassion fatigue (Ayuko & Boyle, 2009; Hooper, et al., 2010; Sprang et al., 2007). The ability to utilize multiple nursing, medical, psychological, social, or moral theories, and philosophies to fully understand compassion may aid nurses in finding fulfillment and meaning in their profession.

Research Question
How do experienced nurses perceive and describe their experiences of providing compassionate care in their nursing practice?

ABSTRACT
Nursing practice in the 21st century focuses on the use of evidence to support best nursing practice, as well as creating a caring environment for nurses and the communities they serve. Studies have been conducted on caring and compassion in nursing practice. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how experienced registered nurses perceive and describe their experiences of compassion in their practice. The goal of the research is to add to the understanding of the phenomenon of compassion in the profession of nursing. A qualitative-phenomenological research study was utilized to advance the reflective, human nature of nursing. The specific concept of compassion was studied through the use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. A purposive sample of six experienced registered nurses was studied. Two categories were identified consisting of five themes. The first category described the lived experience of compassion with the themes suffering of nursing and being truly present in the moment identified. The second category described giving compassionate care made the nurse feel. The themes listed under this category are providing, presence of fulfillment, care of self and others, and finding where one can give compassion as an experience. The knowledge gained from this study increased the understanding of compassion as a descriptor of the art of nursing as well as added to the science of nursing. Recommendations for future research include further study of the identified themes by conducting large scale quantitative and mixed method studies with representative samples of all specialties of nursing. Recommendations for practice include incorporating the themes into applications for staff nurses, nurse educators and nurse leaders.

Theoretical Framework
Theoretical frameworks provide the connections between the research questions to the theoretical constructs (Brown, 2012). Connecting a study to a theory provides importance to the study. The results of the study may support or provide a connection to the theory. Dossey’s theory on integral nursing was the theoretical framework chosen for this study (Dossey & Keegan, 2013). Dossey’s theory on integral nursing offers nurses the opportunity to reflect on what their purpose and their passions are, as well as how they live them in their practice (Dossey & Keegan, 2013). Dossey’s theory of integral nursing promotes the importance of qualitative and quantitative research in nursing. The integral nursing theory supports cultural and interpretive experiences expanding the nurses’ consciousness while increasing nursing’s knowledge base. Healing is the center core concept of the theory. Healing is defined as mental, emotional, social, physical and spiritual balance. The theory of integral nursing explores how nurses can understand and be more aware of their wholeness and healing capacities and their ability to provide compassionate care. The theory of integral nursing encourages the nurse to reflect on their practice. The integral nursing framework recognizes that being with as an important theme in the doing to or doing for another person. Dossey’s theory of integral nursing which has healing as the core concept provides an interconnection between offers which supports the concept of compassion.

Demographic Characteristics

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Area of nursing currently working in:
- School nursing (1)
- Military (1)
- Management (1)
- Education (3)

References:
Available on request: asayan@umich.edu

Methodology
Purposive sampling
Inclusion criteria
- Minimum of five years of nursing experience
- Graduate nursing student at a Christian university
- Semi-structured interviews
- Verbatim transcription of taped interviews by the researcher
- Verification of transcription accuracy by each participant

Demographic data obtained at initial interview
- Initial descriptive analysis completed
- Analysis using modified version of Van Kaam method completed
- Researcher analyzed texts of interviews
- Triangulating analyst reviewed clustered meaning units.

Discussions with triangulating analyst lead to determination of themes

STORIES

Demographic Data

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