

The “Lived Experience” of Nursing Faculty Following the Death of a Student



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Background

Researcher became interested in exploring bereavement in the college population when confronted with the sudden death of a student:

“I as the professor felt powerless, numb, and inadequately prepared to manage the array of emotions and grief amongst the senior class of 33 nursing students ”

While nursing faculty teach students how to care for patients and their families at end of life, little is known about the impact of a student’s death on nursing faculty. Significant gaps exist related to this phenomenon in faculty role preparation and nursing education literature.

Hedman (2012) in a study of college faculty’s attitude toward grieving found faculty were more likely to provide accommodations initially if they themselves had a personal historical connection with a friend’s or student’s death, compared to no personal history. Is this type of response true for nursing faculty?

Since little is known about the grief reactions of nursing faculty following the death of a student, the following research question guided this inquiry:

What is the lived experience of nursing faculty following the sudden unanticipated death of a student?

Purpose

The aim of this phenomenological qualitative research study is to explore the grief experiences and reactions of nursing faculty following the unanticipated, sudden death of a nursing student.

Methodology

- Descriptive Phenomenology
- Husserl Philosophy
- Bracketing & Intuiting
- Colaizzi’s Method of Data Analysis



The source of qualitative data included a demographic questionnaire and in-depth interviews with participants. Interviews were digitally recorded, and verbatim transcriptions were analyzed utilizing Colaizzi’s (1978) methodology.

Data Immersion

“I had the unfortunate experience of having this happen to me twice, both very sudden, both related to overdose, unintentional and intentional, pretty shocking, very saddened, and angry.”

“Do faculty contribute to the students need to hurt their health in order to be successful?”

“We gave the students accommodations for two weeks, some students felt they needed the semester, some were taking advantage of this, but we did give them 2 weeks and they needed to move on”

“I named my student nurse challenge after him, he never had the opportunity to be a nurse”

“You grieve terribly. You grieve the person, you grieve the loss of a student, you grieve their loss, but it is comforting that her name continues through our “Walk for __”

“A lot of us were together remembering her, finding comfort in being together in our grief”

Findings

Emerging Themes:

- ① Emotional Turmoil of Loss; Faculty do Grieve
- ② Enduring Relationship; “Not Forgotten”
- ③ Togetherness in Grief; “Sense of Community”
- ④ Pedagogical Struggle: Providing accommodations/ maintaining rigor

Conclusions

This study raises awareness of the loss and grief experienced among nursing faculty when a student dies. Nurse faculty serve as teachers, role models, coaches, and mentors not only in the classroom but in the clinical setting. The unique closeness of this relationship poses an additional challenge to faculty when a student dies. Study participants experienced grief reactions similarly to the loss of a friend or family member. Administrative support and instrumental grief activities such as establishing scholarships, events in their name, and fundraising activities were perceived as helpful for participants. However, the majority of participants continued to struggle with classroom requirements and accommodations following the death, warranting the need for dialogue and faculty education related to this topic. Although this study addressed a gap in bereavement literature, these empirical findings suggest continued research is needed in this understudied area.

References

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