The Lived Experience of Emergency Nurses: What Has Been Learned From Traumatic & Violent Events

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Introduction

Terrorism, violence, and traumatic events plague our lives daily. The Emergency Department (ED) setting is the only area in healthcare that people arrive unexpectedly as a result of these horrific events. Ever since the beginning of time, humans have been exposed to stressful events that include natural and man-made disasters. Emergency nurses are usually the first contact that the patient has in the ED. Unlike other healthcare professionals emergency nurses face undue burdens as a result of the care they provide to patients affected traumatic and violent events (Adriaenssens, de Gucht, & Maes, 2012; Tubbert, 2016). Being exposed to traumatic experiences may put the emergency nurse at risk for emotional injury. By investigating responses to traumatic situations, it was possible to document and share the processes that a group of emergency nurses use to cope with the effects of violent and traumatic events that could impact their health and work performance.

Method

The qualitative research method chosen for this study was phenomenology because it could amplify the voices of emergency nurses who respond to violent and traumatic events. Based on van Manen's (1990) phenomenological method this study sought to understand the lived experience of emergency nurses when confronted with traumatic and violent events.

Sample:
Purposeful sampling was used because the selected individuals were required to have first hand experience with the phenomenon of interest. The participants were all direct care nurses who worked full-time as Registered Nurses employed at a Level I Trauma Center Emergency Department in a Metropolitan area.

Data Collection:
Data was culled from personal interviews conducted one-on-one with each participant. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim, reviewed, and analyzed for recurrent themes until data saturation was achieved.

Analysis:
The data was transcribed the data was then analyzed for recurrent themes and categorized. Once the themes were identified dialogues occurred with each of the participants to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions and to add further elaboration.

Findings

The participants were able to recall actual experiences and feelings that they had while caring for victims of trauma and violence. Several themes seem to ring clear as each participant shared a story. The themes were supported by the literature and previous studies that emergency nursing is a stressful profession. It was reconfirmed as per the experiences that each of the participants shared.

Themes

What motivates this group of emergency nurses to return to work everyday? It is suggested that the tentative answer might be in the ten themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the participants.

- Behavioral manifestations
- Communication
- Empathy
- Humor
- Knowledge and skills
- Support of peers and family
- Pediatric distress
- Teamwork
- Uncertainty
- Workload

Conclusions

- Spending twelve hours in triage or the trauma room may be too overwhelming and possibly damaging to the wellness of the emergency nurse. Limiting the length that the nurse is exposed to these areas may reduce overall stress.
- Offering debriefing after traumatic/violent events and perhaps making attendance mandatory to the session(s) will allow for the staff to speak about their feelings and release some tension.
- Incorporating humor into the workplace. Letting the staff know that it is okay to laugh; by incorporating humor into staff meetings and debriefing sessions.

References

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