

Registered general nurses perceptions of older adults sexuality in a palliative care community hospital setting.

Claire O'Donnell, Mary Ryan Maher
Universit of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

Theme: Human Rights

Research Title: Registered general nurses perceptions of older adult's sexuality in a palliative care community hospital setting.

Background: Community hospitals in Ireland provide a wide range of services and are primarily focused on the needs of the elderly such as assessment and rehabilitation, convalescent care, respite and palliative care. The World Health Organisation (2002), in defining palliative care, included all patients with life threatening illnesses as well as cancer. Traditionally, the study of nurses' attitudes toward sexuality has been both sporadic and sparse, with limited research in the area of sexuality and clinical practice, and less so in the palliative care discipline. Although holistic care is stressed in nursing, sexuality remains a taboo issue in our society, not only for nurses and other health professionals, but for the lay population as well (Higgins et al 2008, Peate, 2008). In particular, the role of sexuality for older people is becoming more and more relevant as people live longer, remain healthy, and become better educated and well informed.

Aim: The aim of this study is to explore registered general nurse's perceptions of older adult's sexuality in a palliative care community hospital setting.

Methodology: A sample of ten nurses with three years experience or more from an Irish Community Hospital setting were recruited for this study, using a rich data qualitative descriptive design to elicit information about the perceptions of the participants. The method for the data collection was semi structured interviews. Colaizzi's method of data analysis was used to analyse and identify themes from the sourced data.

Results: Findings obtained in this study indicate that while nurses are aware of the importance of sexuality for older adults they experience problems dealing with issues of sexuality in practice and the reasons for this were complicated and complex. Educational deficit was identified as one of the main reasons for not discussing sexuality-related issues with patients.

Conclusion: Results from this study validate further exploration of the assumption that better education for health professionals will aid the process of incorporating sexuality into nursing care and thereby delivering truly holistic care.