

The clinical area placement experiences and coping strategies of first year general nursing students

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ABSTRACT

When nursing students engage in clinical practice, the general assumption is that they are learning to apply their acquired knowledge and skills of the art of nursing.

This qualitative study, sought to explore and describe the experiences and coping of first year students enrolled in the general nursing science programme. The objectives of the study were to: identify the students' conceptualization of their clinical role; explore their clinical experiences; determine issues affecting clinical learning and identify the coping strategies used.

Data were collected through audio-taped face-to-face individual and focus group interviews from a sample of 22 students of both sexes. Informed consent was given verbally. The data were analyzed utilizing the method of Giorgi, Fischer and Murray (1975).

The findings indicated that the students regarded their clinical role as learners. However, to a greater extent, they encountered challenging experiences while in the wards, as manifested by uncondusive ward environment, negative inter/intrapersonal relationships, inadequately structured clinical activities, anxiety and shortage of both human and material resources. While the students initially engaged in problem-focused ways of coping, they soon resorted to maladaptive coping strategies.

The data suggested that clinical practice was predominantly 'patient-centered' rather than being 'learner-centered'. The findings have implications for nursing education, practice, administration and research, as well as the Swaziland Nursing Council. Recommendations are given.

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