The Lived Experience of Nursing Severe Burns Injury Patients
A Phenomenological Inquiry

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Masters of Nursing Science of the University of Adelaide, South Australia

School of Population Health & Clinical Practice
Faculty of Health Sciences
Discipline of Clinical Nursing

October 2009
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DECLARATION

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This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, where deposited in the Discipline Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed:

Dated: 17th of September 2009.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As a devoted mother of three young children and a doting wife, writing this thesis has been challenging at times. However, it has been my passion for burns nursing that has been the driving force behind this project although, this academic journey would not have been possible if it were not for the support of family members and numerous friends. Without the acknowledgement of those individuals who have encouraged and assisted me throughout this journey, this thesis would not be complete and I would like to thank them all for allowing me this opportunity.

Firstly, I would like to thank my parents Elizabeth and the late Thomas Kornhaber for all the years that they have supported me in my education. My wonderful husband and friend of 11 years Hilary Nissenbaum, for putting up with ironing, washing and research papers consuming all rooms of our house for the entire duration of this project. My mother in – law Celina Nissenbaum, for all those times she looked after the children at a moment’s notice. Thanks to my three children Thomas, Rebecca and Joshua for being patient and at times not so patient with me throughout the writing of this dissertation. I dare not forget to mention my pseudo step father Geoff Scott who remained positive throughout the research project.

I want to express my gratitude to my principal supervisor Dr Anne Wilson, for her undying support, patience and tolerance over not only the past year but also in the previous year leading up to my Masters dissertation. I am heartily thankful to her, whose encouragement, guidance and support from the initial to the final level enabled me to complete this thesis. I would especially want to thank Dr Anne Wilson for assisting me through the very challenging times during the data analysis process, giving me encouragement when all was lost and for fielding my hundreds of questions at a moment’s notice throughout the entire year. Also I would like to thank my co-
supervisor Associate Professor Rodney Baber, his positive encouragement and in put during the proposal stage was invaluable and with providing assistance in numerous ways throughout. I am also grateful to Associate Professor Rodney Baber and his secretary Coral Anderson for their patience throughout. I am grateful for the assistance of Dr Loyola McLean for her assistance with the methodology and during the data analysis stage whilst having all my three children in her office and popcorn strewn all over the floor, I thank her. I am grateful for the assistance of Frank Donnelly for his guidance with writing the chapter on the methodology of phenomenology. I must mention the assistance of Dr Jacqueline Baker for her assistance during the data analysis process and for steering me in the right direction when I charted off course.

To my two comrades and colleagues Julia Philips and Agnes Wroblewski at the Douglas Piper Library for assisting me with literature searching and often at a moment’s notice however, having a laugh along the way. I must in addition say that I am eternally grateful to Julia Philips for her patience and assistance with teaching me the referencing programme EndNote and with formatting the final document in preparation for examination. I wish to thank Gina all the way from Paris, France for her assistance with analysing and organising the data at Little Hartley and that cold, cold day in my kitchen sorting through the data cards.

I would also like to thank the NSW Burns Injury Service, the Director of the Severe Burns Injury Unit at Royal North Shore Hospital Dr John Vandervord and the Nursing Unit Manager of the Severe Burns Injury Unit Di Elfleet, for their support throughout the project. I direct a special thanks to all the seven participants and I would like to acknowledge all the many people who have contributed to the formation of this thesis even if they have not been personally identified in the above acknowledgement. Finally, my hearty gratitude goes again to Hilary, my husband for his eternal patience.
ABSTRACT

Little nursing research has focused on nurses’ experiences of nursing severe burns injury patients. This study has provided a gateway to explore, describe and document the experience of nursing severe burns injury patients. This thereby adds to the existing body of nursing knowledge upon which the nursing care of patients with severe burns injury can be made in an informative manner with confidence.

This descriptive phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of seven full time registered nurses that care for patients who have sustained a severe burns injury. The descriptive phenomenology of Husserl and the methodological interpretations of Colaizzi underpin this study. Purposeful sampling was utilised to select participants who work in a severe burns injury unit in New South Wales, Australia. The use of in-depth interviews was used to generate data about the participants’ personal and professional experiences’ of nursing severe burns injury patients. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, analysed and described using a descriptive phenomenological methodology.

Twenty eight cluster themes emerged from the participants’ experiences which were further merged into nine emergent themes that depicted the experiences of nurses caring for severe burns injury patients which formed the basis of the findings reported. Participants described burns nursing as both physically and emotionally demanding yet rewarding. It was shown that burns nurses have a resilient nature with the ability to cope with the challenges of burns nursing. Participant nurses described how they emotionally detached and became hardened to the devastation of a severe burns injury. The unique bond that formed between burns nurses and their patients’ demonstrated a relationship embedded in trust and understanding that allowed the
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Nurse to continue caring for burns patients for extended periods. Commitment and dedication were found to be fundamental elements for nursing burns patients. Participant nurses were found to feel emotionally exhausted, powerless and burnt out; however, feelings of accomplishment and motivation outweighed these negative emotions. Support and unity was identified as fundamental to burns nursing, without the support of the burns team nurse participants believed that they would not be able to care for patients with severe burns injury.

The findings of this study have provided an insight into the experience of nursing severe burns injury patients. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the care of burns patients and the well being of the burns nurses who care for these patients. The paucity of available literature in the area of burns nursing concludes that more research is required into the impact of nursing severe burns injury patients.