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BEING A PSYCHIATRIC NURSE: SHARED HUMANITY AND THE NURSE

PATIENT ENCOUNTER



Kenneth David Walsh

RPN, RGN, B.Nurs (UNE)

The Department of Clinical Nursing

The University of Adelaide

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## ABSTRACT

This is a phenomenological study aimed at uncovering meaning and generating understanding of being a psychiatric nurse via the phenomenon of the nurse-patient encounter.

The study was informed by Heideggerian phenomenology and the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer. Seven psychiatric nurses were interviewed about their experience of the nurse-patient encounter. These interviews were transcribed and interpreted using a method of hermeneutic analysis that was inspired by the writings of Hans Georg Gadamer.

The elements to emerge from the interpretation of these encounters are the existentials of Being with as understanding, Being with as possibility, and Being with as care-full concern in the horizons of Time and the World. Each of these existentials and horizons have modes which are also described in the study.

An underlying theme of shared humanity emerged from the encounters and had the effect of unifying the existentials. Shared humanity informed and guided the encounters and the projected possibilities envisaged by the nurses. In the shared humanity of the encounter the patient is perceived as a fellow human being more similar than different to the nurse. Shared humanity is seen as essential to understanding the patient as an immediate living human being and to the projection of possibilities in the encounter.

The modes of the "Self" nurse and the "They" nurse also emerged from the study and are described in the study. The nurses in the study chose to approach the

patient in the "self" nurse mode of psychiatric nursing which appreciates the common grounding of shared humanity in the encounter rather than the "They" nurse mode which covers over such shared humanity and denies the possibility of a true being to being encounter.