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Nurses' Perceptions of People who are Homeless

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Introduction:
Perceptions of nurses who care for people who are homeless in the acute care setting is unknown. The purpose of this study is twofold: identify nurses' perceptions of people who are homeless and explore nurses' perceptions of the care provided to this population. Research questions include: how do nurses perceive people who are homeless and how do nurses perceive the care provided to people who are homeless.

Method(s):
Interpretative phenomenology is being employed to reveal the taken-for-granted day to day experiences of nurses' perceptions of people who are homeless. Network sampling is being used to recruit participants with diverse ethnicity, gender, area of practice and number of years experience as a registered nurse.

Results:
Data collection is ongoing. To date, 9 nurses (ages 24-58 years) have been interviewed. Sample characteristics include 6 medical surgical and 3 emergency department nurses, 2 males and 2 African American nurses. Initial data analysis indicates interwoven themes of nurses' distress in caring for people who are homeless such as lack of time to focus on complex health and social issues and feelings of loss of caring connections with patients. Other themes emerging...
Discussion:
Perceptions of care provided to patients who are homeless are positive while perceptions of care provided by other nurses are mixed, which is consistent with currently published research. Unique to this study are nurses' perceptions of losing their connection with the patients, and judgmental attitudes such as blame. The nurse/patient relationship which impacts patient outcomes may be strained due to bias, time constraints and lack of connection; however the impact of perceptions on care is unknown. The findings of this study are providing information for future research about the impact of nurse perceptions and attitudes on the quality of nursing care provided to people who are homeless.

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