

The Care of People With Dementia in Rural New South Wales

Kay Shannon

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to answer the research question "how do nurses in small rural hospitals care for people with dementia?" A qualitative methodology utilizing a case study research design was chosen to explore how a purposefully selected sample of 21 nurses, employed in three small rural hospitals in one region of New South Wales, Australia, cared for people with dementia. Data for this project were composed of transcripts of interviews with 19 nurse participants and field notes made by the researcher at the times of site visits and following periods of observation of six nurse participants caring for three purposively selected patient participants. The data reveals that the nurse participants are concerned about the safety of people with dementia at the study sites for the project. Nurses describe simple ways for caring for people with dementia such as maintaining a calm atmosphere, allowing people to wander when it is safe for them to do so, and the use of "specials" and restraint in order to keep people safe when no other alternatives are available. In addition, this study finds that the nurse respondents are keeping people with dementia in their own communities, where they can remain close to people who know them and can provide them with support. Nurse respondents value their positive relationships with other members of their communities, and utilize these relationships in order to enhance the care that they provide for people with dementia in their hospitals. The first conclusion of this study is that the physical environments of the study sites for the project influence the way that care is provided in these hospitals, resulting in some care that is person-centred and some care that is risk management or task focused. The second conclusion of this study is that the nurse respondents use their community connectedness to enable them to provide care for people with dementia, in partnership with families and other community members. The conclusions that have been drawn from this study have implications for practice, practitioner education and policy, with potential for this positive aspect of rural nursing practice to be applied in a wider context.

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Abbreviations

ACAT	Aged Care Assessment Team
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographical Classification
BPSD	Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia
CEHR	Committee for Ethics in Human Research
GP	General Practitioner
GWAHS	Greater Western Area Health Service
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NSW	New South Wales
UC	University of Canberra

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