INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project was to gain insight on the meaning of care among nurses and those with opioid addiction in a hospital setting. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with patients who were struggling with addiction and those that care for them in the acute care setting. New insight on the phenomena of caring centered around opioid addiction was gained. Data analysis of the patient narratives revealed the themes of being treated differently, not regarded as a person, and lack of respect. Data analysis of those who care for these patients revealed themes of experiencing compassion fatigue and feeling challenged while properly treating pain.

BACKGROUND

- Opioid addiction is a national crisis. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports:
  - 22.5 million people misused prescription opioids in 2015.
  - Approximately 828,000 people used heroin of 20 years.
  - New patients are often placed under the care of addiction care.
  - “Common Stigmas about Addiction include:
    - People with a drug addiction are criminals who can’t be trusted.
    - People who use illegal drugs only come into the hospitals seeking pain medication.
    - People with a drug addiction are criminals who can’t be trusted.
    - Those with a drug addiction are criminals who can’t be trusted.
    - People who use illegal drugs only come into the hospitals seeking pain medication.

FROM THOSE ADDICTED...

I hate it when I need my pain medicines and they(nurses) take their time getting it like its coming out of their paychecks. Just give me my medicine! (Mr. Wolfe, a recovering addict for 8 months)

“As soon as they [nurses] hear that I am with a methadone clinic, they treat me like I am a junkie.” (Mr. Johnson, current heroin user who is actively on methadone)

Although I have been clean for a year, I am still treated like I am actively using. It’s like being put back into a box you work so hard to climb out of!” (Mr. Washington, a recovering addict of one year)

FROM THOSE WHO CARE...

“I feel compassion for them (addicted mothers) because I know drug addicts who I personally love.” (Nurse Young, a NICU - 20 years)

“I always feel bad for the babies. Sometimes I feel bad for the mothers, but it is not to feel angry with the moms.” (Nurse Elliott, NICU - 13 years)

“I believe that I was not allowing myself to understand my patient and her struggle with addiction.” (Nurse Moore, Medical-Surgical - 7 years)

FROM THOSE LEARNING TO CARE...

“It is sad. I am a student and a tech. I see so many people, young people, who are addicted to opioids.” (Mr. Smith, Senior nursing student)

“Nurse educators can teach students what to look out for when patients are withdrawing and how to care for patients when it happens. My school do not address this type of issue.” (Ms. McKee, Senior nursing student)

“I think nursing schools can teach students how to show kindness and respect to patients with addiction through role playing and simulation. I know that it is different from in the real-world, but it can give students some form of practice so that we do not get shocked.” (Ms. Chiles, Second semester nursing student)

INSIGHT GAINED

- Addicted patients felt a lack of concern, respect, and caring from their nurses. They expressed that they were treated through the lens of stigma. Often being treated as though they are seeking pain medications just to get high.
- Nurses and nursing students expressed concern related to patient safety when withdrawing from opioids.
- Nurses expressed ambivalence towards the addicted patients they care for. They expressed a desire to care for them without stigma or anger.
- Nurses expressed the need for more knowledge on the deliverance of care towards these patients. They expressed a desire to become more empathetic and caring while setting limitations that may cause unwarranted behaviors.

IMPLICATIONS

- Nurse educators can assist in combating the opioid crisis by incorporating content surrounding abuse and misuse of opioids be balanced with the real and legitimate needs of those seeking treatment.
- Nurse educators can teach students what to look out for when patients are withdrawing and how to care for patients when it happens. My school do not address this type of issue.
- Nurse educators can create an environment that is safe for emerging nurses to express a desire to become more empathetic and caring while setting limitations that may cause unwarranted behaviors.
- Clinical nurse educators can conduct post-conference activities and reflection exercises to give students feedback on the ways that care can be enhanced to these patients.

STIGMA STINGS!

- Stigma can negatively impact a number of areas, including:
  - Willingness to attend treatment and access healthcare services
  - Harm reduction
  - Self-esteem and mental health

- Common Stigmas about Addiction include:
  - People with a drug addiction are criminals who can’t be trusted.
  - People with a drug addiction made a choice and have no self control.
  - People addicted to drugs are failures and can’t be helped.
  - People who use illegal drugs only come into the hospitals seeking pain medication.
  - Most people with addiction are poor, minority, and reside in urban areas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Competence in Caring for Patients with Opioid Addiction: A Phenomenological Approach

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