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JAN Classic article: Patients' emotional reactions to hospitalization: an exploratory study

Hospitalisation can be a significant event for patients and their family, friends, and significant others. In addition to the impact of illness and disease, hospitalisation alters patient's daily routine, sense of self, control and independence. However, it is reassuring to know that the length of stay in hospital is relatively short for many conditions. Many procedures are done on an outpatient basis these days. For instance, patients undergoing lithotripsy, endoscopy, and colonoscopy can go home a few hours after the procedure. Three decades ago, most of these procedures required much longer stay in hospital and prolonged hospitalisation can be stressful.

The article I chose as a JAN classic explored patients' emotional reactions to hospitalisation. Wilson-Barnet published this study in the first volume of JAN in 1976 and I chose this article due to its focus on the psychological impact of hospitalisation on patients, during the 1970s. I wanted to see if the findings related to contemporary nursing practice today. The paper described a study involving exploratory interviews with 200 patients to determine their positive and negative reactions to various aspects of hospitalisation. Patients were asked to respond to 60 statements about hospitalisation. The findings of the study suggest an association between age, gender and response to hospitalisation. Younger patients and females provided more negative responses to the statements.

It was interesting to read different statements explored in the study. Statements Such as: 'knowing your relatives are talking to the doctor/nursing staff'; 'having a bath with the nurse helping you'; 'having your back rubbed'; 'a day when a sister is off duty' were very

interesting and clearly highlight the difference in the provision of care to patients now and in past decades. The writing style and presentation of the article was much more interesting and different from what we would expect today. While the study was conducted on an important topic, the research design was not clearly described. In fact, it is difficult to determine the specific approach—qualitative or quantitative—used in the study. While qualitative expressions such as ‘open questions’ and ‘interview schedule’ were used, the study seemed to be conducted using more of a quantitative approach. For a similar article published today in JAN, one would expect a very different and much enhanced presentation and interpretation of findings. Whilst the pioneering nature of JAN is acknowledged and that these were ‘early days’, comparison of this article with recent articles published in JAN demonstrates the development of JAN as an academic and professional journal and the development of nursing research. At the same time, it is reassuring to note that the nurse readers’ knowledge and understanding of the research and consequently their expectations of presentation and interpretation of findings, critical analysis and discussion has advanced in past four decades. All of this was possible because of nurse researchers like Wilson-Barnett and others pioneers at the time who not only conducted, but also published, nursing research.

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Reference

Wilson-Barnett J (1996) Patients’ emotional reactions to hospitalization: an exploratory study
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