



Government
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SA Health



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An Exploration of the Unique
Transition Experiences of Registered
Nurses in their Graduate Year who
were previously Enrolled Nurses

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Thanks to the Moody Blues.

Title from their 1967 concept album about an everyday persons everyday journey from dawn to night & from awakening to sleep

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The Project

- Research project undertaken at Repatriation General Hospital, Adelaide
- Small project – 5 participants / preliminary study
- Explored transition experiences of RN's in their graduate year who were previously EN's
- Aim was to identify key factors that may have had a positive or negative impact on their transition
- Project is a recognition of the unique set of stressors that can impact on the crucial first year of professional practice for new RN's

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- Project was initiated in response to a range of factors, including anecdotal information and recommendations from the 'Review of Transition to Professional Practice Programs 2005, Gov. of South Australia, Department of Health
- Minimal research about this topic despite high numbers of previously enrolled nurses entering the RN workforce
- Study also included exploration of the participants experiences as students, recognising that student experiences were an important part of their journey

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The Contradiction

- EN transitioning to RN is in a unique situation
- On one hand they have been experienced Enrolled Nurses, but now they are suddenly new practitioners
- Paech (2002) argues they are simultaneously experienced nurses in one sense & yet novice nurses in another
- This contradiction is central to this study!

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The Study

Aim

To explore the unique experiences of RN's in their first year of professional practice who were previously EN's

Specifically to identify key factors from the perspectives of the participants that may have impacted positively or negatively on their transition experiences

Methodology

A qualitative descriptive study informed by ethnography

Individual conversation approach (interview schedule) used to identify shared values of a group

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Exploring the Literature

- At the time of this study, the most significant literature available was a phenomenological study by Paech (2002), which examined the lived experiences of 9 EN's making the transition from student to RN
- 3 central themes identified:
 - Responsibility & Accountability
 - Change
 - Job Satisfaction

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Project Details

- Non-random purposeful sampling used to select participants i.e. participants who wanted to be part of the study and were able to provide richly meaningful, in-depth information
- Study group of five
- All participants were previously practicing EN's
- All participants had undertaken their graduate nurse program at the Repatriation General Hospital, SA
- Two of the five participants had worked at Repat. as EN's

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Project Details (cont.)

- Data collected using an interview schedule and semi structured questions
- All interviews conducted on site at Repat.
- All interviews audio taped and transcribed
- Thematic analysis of interview data
 - Significant statements were organised into clusters of themes, noting common emerging patterns & revealing the study's major themes

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3 Key Themes

- Role Transformation & Accepting Responsibility
- Expectations & Ageism
- Success & Career & the Student Factor

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Theme 1. Role Transformation and Accepting Responsibility

Characterised by a shift in thinking as they transition from EN to RN

- Adjusting to a delegation responsibility as an RN
 - Initial difficulty in delegating to EN's
 - In their new RN delegation role they felt they were “nicer” to EN's
“I never put them down or made them do menial tasks”
 - But confidence re delegation issues was acquired quickly
- Grappling with a sudden change in responsibility & accountability
“the buck stops here”

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Theme No. 2 Expectations & Ageism

Expectations and experiences of the participants :

- as students while they were on placement
- when they returned to their workplace following placement
- in their graduate transition year
 - Sub theme of ageism

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Theme 2 (cont.) Expectations and Ageism

Expectations and experiences as students on placement

- less support during student placements because of their EN status
“they tend not to spend the time showing things to you that they should because you’re an EN”
- Being utilised as an EN during some undergraduate student placements

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Theme 2 Expectations and Ageism

Expectations and experience in their own workplace

- Some difficulty in peer relationships *“green eyed devil from my enrolled nurse peers”*
- Dismissed by their peers in workplace when discussing new ideas learned during clinical placement
- Decision not to return as RNs to their previous place of employment because of peer attitudes
“they were quite scathing of university trained people and I wanted to get away from that”
- One participant pursued an RN career as she felt *“put down”* because of her EN status
- Several participants claimed they received mixed attitudes from workplace peers regarding their desire to pursue their RN education

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Theme 2 Expectations and Ageism

Expectations and experience in the transition year

- Common feeling of being disadvantaged during the transition year because of their previous EN status
- Higher expectations of them because of their EN experience and abilities

“I’d probably say to them, make sure you ask. Because someone says to you, ‘Oh you’re an EN and you know how to do that’, if you don’t know how to do something, stand up for yourself and ask. You’re just as entitled as anyone else to that assistance”

One participant reported being given a significantly more complex and acute patient allocation simply on the grounds of her previous EN experience

“My pride didn’t want me to say I can’t do this”

- Supported by literature, Paech (2002) found similar evidence and argued that former enrolled nurses have specific needs, and it would be easy to over use or under use them as a result of preconceptions of what they can do

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Theme 2

Expectations and Ageism

Expectations and experience in the transition year (cont.)

- But - Many positive comments about the benefits of their previous experience as an EN
- *“I think if I hadn’t been an EN, I don’t know that I would have coped”*
- *“I think I would have felt quite out of my depth in that ward if I didn’t have previous experience”*
- Nearly all participants mentioned the advantages they had with time management

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Theme 2 (cont.) Expectations and experience in the transition year

The Age Factor! The Sub-theme of ageism

- Several participants encountered ageist attitudes, one participant perceived peers regarded her as too old to commence a career as an RN
- Participants also received feedback & assumptions about their age & experience as EN's

“you should know this stuff”

“and age - we were mature age, & they expect 30 years of experience out of you”

“They thought I had been an EN for 20 years, which I hadn't”

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Theme No. 3 Success, Career & the Student Factor

This theme explored career aspirations, enhancement & opportunities, personal development, reasons why participants pursued their RN qualifications & their choice of graduate transition program

- All participants mentioned their personal desire to enhance their career path, self esteem & lifestyle by pursuing their RN qualifications
“I wanted to extend myself & I wanted to go a bit further”
- Only one participant specifically cited financial interests as a determining factor
- Several of participants cited the availability of the external study options as a major factor in deciding to pursue the Bachelor of Nursing as it assisted with work & family commitments

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Project Limitations

- Small study group / preliminary study
- Participants were at various stages of transition, post graduation
- All participants were mature aged, female and therefore not representative
- Sample sourced from one hospital only
- Unable to extrapolate results for application to the wider community
- Study group dissipated soon after the completion of the data collection making further validation of themes unlikely

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Recommendations

Further research:-

- Larger study group
- More representative study group, e.g. age, gender, more work sites
- Explore experiences of participants at the end of their graduate transition year
- Officially recognise and develop systems to meet the differing needs of these nurses i.e. with nurse educators, managers, clinical nurses, peer support partners or student facilitators
- Consider further research into ageism relating to mature aged EN's transitioning to RN's

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- Thank you
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