

Paper Session C3: Reflections on Clinical Practice

Perception and Use Of Reflection Among Experienced Clinical Nurses

Marilyn E. Asselin, PhD, RN-BC, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, Coventry, RI ~ Paulette Osterman, PhD, RN, Community College of Rhode Island, North Kingstown, RI ~ Donna Schwartz-Barcott, PhD, RN, University of Rhode Island, West Greenwich, RI

Purpose: Describe how experienced clinical nurses perceive and use reflection in practice.

Background: Nursing scholars argue reflection (a deliberate cognitive process of looking back and thinking about a clinical situation) is critical to professional practice. It assumes new insight and positive change. Schon (1991) identified reflection-in-action and reflection-on action, emphasizing the former. Although several prescriptive models exist, there is a dearth of empirical data on nurses' perception and use of reflection in practice.

Methods: A descriptive qualitative design, including in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of twelve experienced, acute care RNs practicing in a hospital in the northeast was used to address: the nurse's perception of reflection, its use in clinical practice and the nature of reflection as described by these nurses. Data collection and analysis followed Rubin & Rubin's (2005) responsive interviewing model: audio-taped interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed independently by three researchers; iterative analysis in relation to each research question, within and across interviews; codes established for nurses' perceptions of "reflection;" reflective clinical situations identified and coded as pre-condition, process and consequence.

Results: The term 'reflection' was not readily familiar. Participants vividly described situations involving considerable thought. Twenty-four situations entail reflection-on-action and two, reflection-in-action. A situationally and emotionally-- rather than deliberately, cognitively driven-- process emerged. A precondition included the nurse's emotional connection to a specific patient/family or a past personal or professional situation. The process included time lags following a situation, triggers stimulating looking back, re-examination, evaluation, and generation of new insight. For some, consequences involved identification of a specific behavior and subsequent action resulting in positive (improved communication) or negative (ritualistic practice) implications.

Conclusions and Implications: Reflection-on-action was selectively used. Exploration of facilitated reflection to enhance the cognitive process and translate insights to practice may improve quality and safety outcomes.