

Organisational Culture and the Role of the Mental Health Nurse: An Ethnography of the New Graduate Nurse Experience

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Abstract : Background: It has been reported that the experience of the organisational workplace culture for new graduate mental health nurses plays an important role in their attraction and retention to the discipline. Additionally, other research indicates that a negative workplace culture contributes to their dissatisfaction and attrition rate. Method: An ethnographic research design was applied to explore the subcultural experiences of new graduate nurses as they encounter mental health nursing. Data was collected between April and September 2017 across 6 separate Australian, NSW, mental health units. Data comprised of semi-structured interviews (n=24) and 31 episodes of field observation (62 hours). A total number of 26 new graduate and recent graduate nurses participated in the study - 14 new graduate nurses and 12 recently graduated nurses. Results: A key finding from this study was the New Graduate difficulty in articulating the role the of mental health nurse. Participants described a dichotomy between their ideological view of the mental health nurse and the reality of clinical practice. The participants' ideological view of the mental health nurse involved providing holistic and individualised care within a flexible framework. Participants, however, described feeling powerless to change the recovery practices within the mental health service(s) because of their low status within the hierarchy. Resulting in participants choosing to fit into the existing culture, or considering leaving the field altogether. Conclusion: An incongruence between the values and ideals of an organisational culture and the reality shock of practice are shown to contribute to role ambiguity within its members. New graduate nurses entering the culture of mental health nursing describe role ambiguity resulting in dissatisfaction with practice. The culture and philosophy inherent to a service are posited to be crucial in creating positive experiences for graduate nurses.

Keywords : culture, mental health nurse, mental health nursing role, new graduate nurse

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