

Summary of the PhD Dissertation

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Curriculum Vitae

I was born and grew up in the rural part of the canton of Zurich in Switzerland and here I live again with my long-time partner and husband and our lovely dog Ginger. For the last thirteen years I have been working as a clinical nurse specialist in Winterthur and will now continue my career as head of nursing development in a mental health institution in Eastern Switzerland. During my professional career I have had the chance to live in California for a while and I got my master's degree in nursing science at Cardiff University in Wales.

Before nursing became my professional passion, I have been trained as a station manager working for the Swiss National Railways and later as a travel agent. In the early 90's I emigrated to the US and went through an intensive training programme as a chaplain for people living with HIV/AIDS. The plan to study nursing in the US did not work out as planned and so I returned to Switzerland where I got my general nursing degree at the School of Nursing at the Psychiatric University Hospital in Zurich.

For almost ten years I have been working in acute health care settings and rehabilitation care before I returned to mental health nursing in 2007. My main interest in nursing has always been people's experiences in dealing with their health conditions and how nurses can support them in this process. Humanising healthcare, building professional relationships and getting involved with people's stories and lives are my main motivation and drive.



Description of the project

Creating Meaning – Understanding the Experiences of People Living with Mental Illness in Switzerland – A Qualitative Study

Abstract

Mental illnesses have a large impact on individuals, their families and friends and communities (Wittchen et al. 2011). People living with mental illness often face discrimination and not the least within the healthcare system (Corrigan et al. 2005, Rüschi et al. 2005). However, there is an ongoing shift from a paternalistic to a person-centred approach in the treatment of people living with mental illness (Mezzich et al. 2016). User involvement in the development of care has become common practice and personal recovery rather than cure is at the core of treatment (Amering and Schmolke 2012). However, to further improve professional practice, there is a need to understand

more about the experiences of people living with mental illness.

The aim of this research is to explore and evaluate the personal experiences of people living with mental illness in Switzerland and to identify aspects that are most relevant to this population in living with and adapting to mental illness. Therefore, the study aims to create an understanding of the adaptation process to mental illness from a patient perspective.

A constructivist and reflexive Grounded Theory approach was chosen for the main study (Breuer et al. 2017, Charmaz 2014). Ten participants, people living with mental illness in Switzerland, were interviewed. However, the project also includes a preliminary study, comprising a focus group with mental health professionals, that used qualitative thematic analysis. The preliminary study focused on the topic of uncertainty in illness among people living with mental illness from a nursing perspective (Wolfensberger et al. 2019).

Three categories were generated from the data of the main study: Constructing explanations refers to the process of participants trying to understand what is going on in their lives. Defining self-identity points out that people living with mental illness provide themselves with an understanding of who they are. Making sense-of-life refers to the aspect, that the participants give situations meaning and take control over them. The three categories form the theoretical framework of the Creating Meaning Theory, which summarises the experiences of the people interviewed for this study. The findings support existing theories but add a new and unique understanding of people's experiences in living with mental illness that will help to further improve concepts such as empowerment and recovery.

References

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