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What is your story? The experiences of patients and nurses in secure forensic environments

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Aim: The aim of this presentation is to give voice to the experiences of patients and nurses engaged in therapeutic encounters within the confines of secure forensic mental health environments.

Abstract

Nurses who work in forensic environments, practice at the shifting interface of the criminal justice system and the health care system. How they view those in their care, and more importantly, how they engage those in their care, is a significant concern for nursing. Forensic clients are members of a highly stigmatized and stereotyped population. The ability of forensic mental health nurses to provide competent and ethical nursing care is often compromised by personal, social, and political animosity regarding crime, criminality, and mental disorder. Pausing to reflect on the stories of clients and nurses, within a narrative context, evokes understanding, and contributes to the creation of person centered care.

In paper one, the coercive treatments experienced by a man who has spent many years in compulsory care in a variety of secure psychiatric settings is explored in response to his confession “I don’t dare to tell them I feel okay!” In paper two, how nurses transition to their roles as forensic nurses is considered as they straddle the custodial and therapeutic aspects of their work, often expressing concerns with their perceptions of “education of the fly” or “faking it ‘til you make it.” In paper three, the mental health contributions of nurses who practice in prisons and correctional institutions is captured in the words “that’s why I bought into this profession, to instill hope and recovery.”

Through the examination of these vignettes that have emerged through research and practice, participants will be engaged in an interactive discussion as we consider the implications of narrative nursing vis-à-vis the vast tensions that exist between theory, practice, and research in forensic mental health nursing. Finally, the universal nature of these issues, highlighting contributions from Sweden, Germany and Canada will be illustrated.