The Lived Experience of Giving Spiritual Care

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Health care researchers have suggested a correlation between better mental and physical health and a person’s spirituality or religious practices (Koenig, 2002). Indeed, using spiritual and religious resources gives patients and families strength to cope during a crisis (Kloosterhouse & Ames, 2000). Given that little is known about nurses’ experiences with spiritual care, one wonders how spiritual care is given (Taylor, 2005), what the experience means to nurses, and how the experience affects nurses and their future actions. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore nurses’ lived experience of giving spiritual care in order to know more about the meanings of this experience. The researcher interviewed 10 nurses who worked in dialysis units to gather information about their experiences of giving spiritual care. The researcher used a descriptive phenomenological approach to conduct the study. Trustworthiness of the study was established through member checks with the participants, peer debriefing, and thick description. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological method. Five themes were identified: “Drawing close,” “Drawing from the well of my spiritual resources,” “The pain of spiritual distress,” “Lack of resources to give spiritual care” and “Giving spiritual care is like diving down deep.” Findings illuminated nurses’ experiences of giving spiritual care as a continuum dependent upon the needs of the patient. The study findings suggest that patients and nurses draw close during the giving of spiritual care, that nurses have spiritual resources they use to prepare for and give spiritual care, and that giving spiritual care can have an emotional cost. These findings have implications for nursing practice, nursing education, and nursing research.

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