

AN EXPLORATION OF NURSES' VIEWS REGARDING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES WHEN CARING FOR A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH A LIFE-THREATENING CONDITION

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BACKGROUND

Professional boundaries are central for the establishment of therapeutic relationships for nurses. Tensions exist between the balance of involvement that is beneficial in the therapeutic relationship, to one that is too close and potentially destructive. This challenge is one that is of common occurrence in children's nursing, where prolonged involvement, caring, and intimacy form the basis from which nursing care is delivered. Literature regarding nursing views of professional boundaries in this context is limited and are often in the form of commentary papers, offering little insight to the actual views of nurses.



AIMS

1. Explore nurses' views regarding professional boundaries when caring for a child or young person and their families with a life threatening condition
2. Understand what influences their views regarding professional boundaries
3. Identify the current level of awareness of professional boundaries in nurses who care for a child or young person with a life threatening condition
4. Determine strategies that experienced nurses use when establishing professional boundaries with children and their families

METHOD

Conducted in a large teaching hospital within the south of England, ethical and research and development approvals were obtained from the local NHS Trust and University to conduct a qualitative, exploratory study. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with six experienced nurses caring for a child or young people and their families with a life threatening condition

RESULTS

- The **determination** of boundaries within a professional yet therapeutic relationship is one of the most **significant challenges** for nurses caring for a child or young person.
- Because of the levels of **intensity**, and the **emotive nature** of working with a child or young person with a life threatening condition the crossing or violation of professional boundaries should be considered as an **occupational hazard** that must be given due attention.
- The **motive** that drives boundary crossing and violations, and the **governance** that is placed to determine such behaviour is important.
- Research designed to **capture meaning** and **understanding** could assist the nursing profession to develop improved **coping techniques** and thus prevent symptoms such as **compassion fatigue**, reduction in empathetic abilities, and **burnout**.

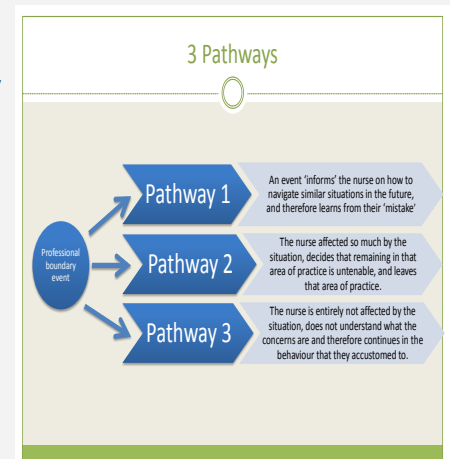
FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS:

Analysis of the study findings revealed two main themes.

Theme 1: Knowledge and Understanding for Practice

Knowledge and understanding of professional boundaries and awareness of meaning was good yet professional boundaries are a routine concern for this group of nurses and for others in practice

- 'It's about being professional'
- 'Increased risk in specific specialities e.g. oncology, TYA, community care'
- 'Professional boundaries can't be taught'
- 'Role modelling and experience is most important' - a 'rite of passage'
- Potentially results in 3 pathways
- In mental health nursing a paradox exists whereby a therapeutic relationship and over involvement is considered an occupational hazard



Theme 2: Management of professional boundaries

- Management of professional boundaries are currently insufficient for nurses working in this area of practice.
- Often poorly managed
- The 'need to be needed'
- Significant degree of emotional labour and compassion fatigue
- Examples describing individuals as 'emotional vampires' who 'feed' on trauma and suffering for personal gain
- Lack of internal governance
- Barriers help—Uniform

'Nurses' need to care to care, but at the detriment of either themselves or those whom they care for is unacceptable'