

# Encounters in Nursing Homes - Experiences from Nurses, Residents and Relatives

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The thesis is based on following papers;

- I. Westin L. & Danielson E. (2006) Nurses' experiences of caring encounters with people living in Swedish nursing homes. *International Journal of Older People Nursing* 1, 3-10.
- II. Westin L. & Danielson E. (2007) Encounters in Swedish nursing homes: A hermeneutic study about residents' experiences. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 60, 172-180.
- III. Westin L., Öhrn I. & Danielson E. (2008) Visiting a Nursing home - Relatives' experiences of encounters with nurses. (Submitted)
- IV. Westin L., Danielson E. & Öhrn I. (2008) Residents' experiences of encounters with relatives and other significant persons in nursing homes. (Submitted)

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## **Abstract:**

The care for residents in nursing homes (special housing) is a major challenge for the nursing profession, especially as the population of older people has increased over the last decades. One important aim for this care is to promote well-being and security for the residents. Encounters between residents, nurses and relatives are one important and frequent activity in the daily care of the residents. Available knowledge shows that the outcome of these encounters can affect the quality of care both in positive and negative ways. The meaning of these encounters is still a rather unknown topic. The reason for conducting research about the meaning of encounters in nursing homes is mainly dependant due to the lack of research with this focus and a need to improve understanding and knowledge about nursing home care with emphasis on the meaning of encounters.

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the experiences of encounters between nurses, residents, their relatives and other significant persons in order to reach a deeper understanding about the meaning of these encounters in nursing homes. A hermeneutic method was used for all four studies in this thesis (I–IV). The hermeneutic method was inspired from Hans George Gadamer and his philosophical hermeneutics. The hermeneutic method provides possibilities to interpret the meaning of human language. All data from participants in this thesis was collected through open ended interviews with nurses, residents and relatives in four nursing homes in a municipality in Western Sweden during the years 2004-2005. The interviews was tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The main results of the original papers showed that the meaning of was interpreted and illuminated as the good encounter (I–IV) and the bad encounter (I–IV). In this thesis, encounters between people in nursing homes have been shown to be important for residents' everyday life in terms of being visible and confirmed but also for nurses' and relatives' need to be visible and confirmed as significant persons in the care for the resident. Nurses play an important role in encounters with residents and their relatives in order to make the residents visible and to maintain his/her respect and dignity as a human being in the nursing home. It is therefore important for nurses to establish intentions for being able to contribute to the good encounter. Being present, attentive and open in the encounter with residents and their relatives and listening to their thoughts is the start of a caring action that will result in making the residents visible and confirmed.

It is of great importance to realize that there are both good and bad encounters in a nursing home context, which makes certain demands on the nurses' competence to be able to meet the resident with an open mind as an effort to achieve the good encounter, which means to see the resident as someone belonging somewhere. Accordingly, it is an urgent matter to implement knowledge about the meaning of encounters in this caring context, knowledge that can probably be transferred to nurses working in other forms of long-term care. This thesis can be seen as a contribution to generating knowledge and providing new understanding that can facilitate the development of such nursing competence; knowledge in the art of caring that gives a deeper understanding of how fundamental each encounter can be for making residents and relatives visible and confirmed as an effort to maintain good quality in the care of residents in nursing homes.

**Key words:** Nursing homes, encounters, nursing homes staff, residents, relatives, nurses.

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