

CHAPTER 5

Summary, limitations and recommendations

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the research findings, discusses the limitations, and reflect the recommendations of the study.

The question that plagued the researcher was what the nurses' opinion was of pain in patients who suffer from dementia. The researcher's aim was to capture the opinion of nurses of patients who suffer from dementia.

The study aimed to explore and describe

- nurses' experiences in interpreting pain in patients suffering from dementia
- strategies used by nurses in assessing pain in patients who suffer from dementia
- the way in which nurses manage pain in patients suffering from dementia
- mechanisms for pain management in patients suffering from dementia

The research approach was non-experimental, qualitative which is exploratory-descriptive and contextual. Data was collected through a focus group discussion.

The study was conducted at the Grosvenor Park Nursing Home in Bexhill-on-Sea , East Sussex in the UK. The initial sample consisted of twelve participants but only seven took part. This was as a result of one participant being unable to participate due to ill health and four who pulled out at the eleventh hour.

The sample consisted of one nursing home manager, two registered nurses, two care assistants with NVQ as well as two care assistants without NVQ. The participants' ages ranged from 23 to 60 and their experience ranged from 1to 15 years. The participants were

all females of different nationalities who all spoke English. The major findings are discussed below.

5.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings of the research are based on the objectives of the study and are discussed below.

- **Nurses' opinion of pain in patients who suffer from dementia**

The participants inferred pain from a wide variety of cues such as aggressive behaviour, withdrawal, facial grimacing, patients' self-report of pain, physical symptoms such as screaming, crying and drawing knees up in cases of abdominal pain as well as an increase in vital signs such as blood pressure, pulse and temperature.

- **Nurses' experience in identifying pain in patients with dementia**

The participants felt that identifying pain in patients who suffer from dementia is challenging due to their inability to express and verbalise their needs. However, the nurses relied on changes in behaviour, elevated vital signs, and symptoms such as screaming, grimacing, or withdrawing. In less severe cases of dementia, the nurses relied on self-report.

- **How nurses manage pain in patients who suffer from dementia**

All the participants agreed that management of pain depends on the level of pain. In the case of mild pain, the patient should be made comfortable and in cases of moderate and severe pain analgesia should be administered. Alternative therapies, such as massage and aromatherapy, were seen as effective remedies for pain.

- **Strategies for pain assessment**

With regard to assessment of pain in patients with dementia, the participants agreed that

monitoring of vital signs such as temperature, pulse, respiration and blood pressure can help determine the presence of pain. Patients' change in behaviour, including aggression or withdrawal, involving the family because they will recognise even the slightest change in behaviour, and retaining the same staff members in the unit for longer periods help to determine the presence of pain as the staff members learn to know the patients' usual behaviour and preferences. However, there were no tools for assessing pain available in the setting. Therefore the participants showed confidence in their ability to assess pain. They also asserted that residents with dementia did experience pain like patients without dementia.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

The size of the sample and the data collection method were limitations in the study.

5.3.1 Sample

The sample consisted of registered nurses, a social worker (home manager) and nursing care assistants. The withdrawal of the community and community psychiatric nurses disabled yielding of rich and valuable perspective. The participants were knowledgeable regarding the nursing home perspective but had insufficient knowledge of the community as well as the psychiatric aspects of caring for patients with dementia.

5.3.2 Method of data collection

Focus group interviews seem like an easy method of collecting data, but in practice they can be tricky. Although the researcher explained the ground rules such as allowing one person to speak at a time, it was not easy and the researcher had to remind the participants of this on several occasions.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Although much research has been done on the management of pain for patients who suffer from dementia, little has been conducted on nurses' opinion of pain in patients with

dementia. From the findings of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations to improve the standard of care and for further research.

5.4.1 Recommendations to improve the standard of nursing care

The participants indicated that they were not taught about pain assessment in their training, therefore it was difficult to recognise the signs of pain as they did not know what to look for. The researcher recommends that:

- The nursing curriculum should include pain assessment strategies as well as strategies to develop pain assessment tools specifically for patients with dementia.
- Nurses' placement in an elderly care setting should be mandatory for student nurses to improve the standard of care for this client group.
- Post-basic courses in gerontology should be introduced for gerontology enthusiasts.

5.4.2 Recommendations for further research

The researcher makes the following recommendations for further research:

- The assessment of pain specifically for patients who suffer from dementia should be researched to guide nurses in accurate assessment that results in effective pain management.
- Studies to develop protocols for pain assessment in the care home facilities for patients who suffer from dementia.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter concluded the study and discussed the findings based on the objectives and included nurses' opinion on pain, pain assessment and pain management in patients who suffer from dementia. The researcher made recommendations for the improvement of the standard of nursing care and further research.