Case studies

Chapter 1  The case for nursing theory

Case study 1.1  Nursing theories

You work as a nurse in paediatrics. As you are walking down the hall to the waiting room, you see a young woman sitting there with a child. You assume she could be the woman’s daughter. The child looks sleepy, pale and sweaty. The mother is tapping her feet and biting her nails and also anxiously looking at the clock and around the hall. You can hear her talking to another mother who is sitting there, explaining she does not know what is wrong with her daughter and that she is frightened and concerned. Suddenly a child starts screaming and crying. The young woman gets up in a panic and starts running towards you with the child in her arms.

As a nurse, you are observing both the mother and the child and you see different things (phenomena). Try to describe what you see, when and why. Now try also to organise and name these different practical things as concepts. When you have done this, you may try to see if there are links or relationships between some of these concepts. If so, you are beginning to develop a theory.

Chapter 2  Knowing in nursing and nursing knowledge

Case study 2.1  Historicism and mental health nursing

Historicism recognises that we are all influenced by our different histories and different experiences, values and beliefs. From these influences we construct our own realities and we interpret events from this construction. In the scenario below, how might the different individuals interpret what has been happening?

Owen is a 46-year-old man, who lives at home with his parents in a small rural village and who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia for many years. He has had several admissions to the local adult acute admission unit due to the effects of both the negative and positive symptoms of his illness. Owen is cared for by his parents although they find their full-time caring role very demanding. Owen’s father, in particular, sometimes becomes very impatient with what he sees as Owen’s unwillingness to help keep himself and his room ‘presentable’. At these times Owen often becomes quite stressed and experiences an increase in hearing voices and experiencing difficult thoughts. This often leads to Owen refusing to come out of his room or being verbally aggressive towards his father and mother, whom he accuses of being spies.

Case study 2.2  ‘Know how’, ‘know that’ and ‘know why’ knowledge

Below is a fictional account from practice. After reading the account, identify examples of ‘know how’, ‘know that’ and ‘know why’ knowledge that might have been used. Then try to identify in the account examples of Carper’s four ways of knowing (empirics, aesthetics, ethics and personal knowledge).

An experienced nurse working in an acute care setting is admitting a patient who has been involved in a road traffic accident and sustained an injury. The patient is young and fit because he does a lot of exercise. His vital signs are all stable, he is conscious and responsive but he is a little pale. Although he seems stable, the nurse is concerned; there is something about him that worries them. The nurse calls the medical registrar, who assesses the patient and sees no immediate course for concern. The patient appears to remain stable, but his complexion is becoming paler, almost transparent. The nurse continues to be concerned as to his welfare, although she cannot really say what it is that is concerning her. The nurse takes the decision to contact the consultant rather than the registrar. The consultant comes to assess the patient and takes the decision to perform an emergency operation where it is discovered that the patient has suffered extensive damage to his spleen and had a severe internal haemorrhage.

Chapter 3  Theory from practice and practice from theory

Case study 3.1  Meleis’s categories of grand theories

Emily, aged 75 years, has been admitted to an assessment unit for older people. Her husband John died 18 months ago and she now lives alone. Her GP had noticed a deterioration in her personal appearance in recent weeks in that she was untidy and neglecting her personal hygiene. As a result, the GP referred Emily to the local consultant and a decision was made to admit Emily for assessment. On admission Emily appeared to be confused and forgetful. Her clothes were baggy and dirty and she looked thin. Her facial skin was dry and flaky. Her lips were dry and cracked. Emily said that she had been sleeping very poorly and the night nursing staff report that she is usually awake from 4am. Emily is reluctant to take part in ward activities and avoids social contact for much of the day. In the first weeks after admission, there were no telephone enquiries regarding her welfare, and no visitors.

In this chapter, we identified Meleis’s four categories of ‘grand’ theories and provided some examples. These were needs, interaction, outcomes and caring/becoming theorists. Which of the grand theories within these categories do you think would be most useful to frame the nursing care that this patient might need?

Chapter 4  Nursing theories and new nursing roles

Case study 4.1  Nursing roles

Megan is 6 years old and her class teacher has noticed a change in her behaviour at school. She has become much quieter, started to have more frequent absences from school and appears anxious. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) primary mental health worker has met with Megan and her mother and noted that Megan’s parents have recently split and that Megan’s mother has depression.

What might be the role of the primary mental health worker in helping Megan and her family?

Chapter 5  Nursing theories or nursing models

Case study 5.1  Systems and behavioural paradigms

Imagine you work as a paediatric nurse. As you are walking down the hall to the waiting room, you see a young woman sitting there with a child. You assume she could be her three-year-old daughter. The child looks as if she is in pain but is also scared. She is asking her mother if she can go home now. The mother is tapping her feet, anxiously looking at the clock and round the hall. You can hear her talking to another mother who is also sitting there, explaining she does not know what is wrong with her daughter and that she is frightened. Suddenly the child starts screaming in pain and crying. The young woman gets up in panic and starts running towards you with a child in her arms.
Try to explain what would be the characteristics of the patient’s treatment from a systems paradigm and from a behavioural paradigm.

Now imagine the same situation, except that this time you are working as a mental health nurse and you know this young woman because she was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia several weeks ago and never came back for a check-up. Try to explain in this case what would be the characteristics of the patients’ treatment from a systems paradigm and from a behavioural paradigm.

Chapter 6 Interpersonal relationships: the essence of nursing models and theories

Case study 6.1 The power of interpersonal relationships

John is a young man of 22. He was abused as a schoolboy by one of his teachers and he left home after many arguments with his parents. He later met Mary, whom he loved very much but she was unfaithful and left him for one of his friends. Shortly after this John decided to end his own life. He bought a rope in a nearby hardware shop and wrote a note outlining that he did not feel he was of any value to anyone. In fact, he felt he was a burden on society. That night he tried to hang himself but the chair on which he was standing broke. He then tried to hang from the banister, but again it broke.

The next day John rang the local suicide helpline who put him in touch with Liam, a community psychiatric nurse. Liam went to see John at his home and the two soon built up a strong interpersonal relationship.

It took months for John to regain some self-esteem and personal regard but with Liam’s help (using Peplau’s theory) it was achieved. Liam liked fishing and he decided to teach John how to fish. The trust between them strengthened. After seven months Liam was able to release John from his caseload. At this stage John was working as a volunteer counsellor and was studying to be a teacher at a nearby university.

John no longer needed to see Liam that often but he knew that all he had to do was lift the telephone. They still go fishing together.

Consider how Liam’s use of Peplau’s theory was helpful in supporting John. Discuss with your colleagues or fellow students how Liam’s relationship with John could have enhanced John’s self-esteem.

Chapter 7 How to select a suitable model or theory

Case study 7.1 Square peg in a round hole

In Rehabilitation Ward 4 in a large teaching hospital, the nurses were under increasing pressure to deliver quality care. Nurse Smith liked working there because it was busy and time passed quickly. She had become a nurse because she wanted to look after people and she loved this aspect of the job. What was increasingly frustrating was the amount of administration that had become part of the job. They were instructed by management to use the KIPS theory of nursing. This had only increased the amount of paperwork, as every patient had to be assessed in 23 different categories.

She and her colleagues decided to select a more appropriate theory for patients who were undergoing rehabilitation. After applying a number of criteria they decided on Orem’s (2006) self-care theory. After some initial teething problems, the theory was introduced successfully. Part of this success was that the patients and their families could understand it and welcomed it. The nurses liked it, too, especially as it reduced the amount of unnecessary paperwork. This meant that Nurse Smith and her colleagues could concentrate on what they really wanted to do – deliver safe and effective rehabilitation care.

Please discuss this case study with your fellow students or colleagues. Are the use of nursing theories synonymous with increased amounts of paperwork? If so, why?

Considering the increase in litigation in the health service, do you accept that you must record how you assess, plan, implement and evaluate care?

Are there clinical settings where less paperwork is necessary – compare working in emergency care with a long-stay elderly rehabilitation unit.
**Chapter 8  Research and theory: some relationships**

**Case study 8.1  Phenomena to theory**

Twenty-one-year-old Colin Smyth was a newly registered nurse who worked in a clinic that cared for young people with leukaemia. Inevitably, these patients attended the clinic for many months. He was the primary nurse for a 25-year-old man called Jamie. Jamie was married to Sandra and they had a two-year-old son. Colin got to know Jamie and his family very well. Jamie had a very virulent form of ‘hairy cell’ leukaemia. He had a poor prognosis and, after six months attending the clinic, he died. This was a very sad occasion for all you knew him.

Three months later, Sandra rang the ward and asked to speak to Colin. She said it was a pity that Colin had not known Jamie when he was fit and strong. Colin agreed. Sandra said she had some early photographs of Jamie that she would like Colin to see. He asked her to bring them up to the ward but she said that would bring back unhappy memories. She asked if she could meet him at a local well-known bar. Reluctantly Colin agreed.

When Colin arrived at the bar, Sandra had the photo album with her. They each had a glass of wine and she described each photograph in turn. After an hour, when they were about to part company, Sandra asked Colin if they could meet again. She had grown fond of him over the months that he had cared for Jamie. Colin diplomatically declined her suggestion.

The next day, he told the ward sister what had happened. She had worked in the leukaemia unit for many years. She smiled when she heard his experience and was not surprised. She said it had happened to her many times and she was still receiving Valentine cards from the husbands of patients she had looked after until they had died.

On reflection, Colin thought this was an interesting phenomenon. He asked other nurses and they too had similar experiences. He did not see anything in the literature that described this phenomenon.

Using theory-generating research (TGR), try to name this phenomenon as a concept, identify the propositions and build a theory to be tested using a theory-testing research (TTR) approach.