

Naturalistic inquiry in acute aged care:

ethnography and practice development a means to hear, understand and empower the silenced

Mrs Miriam Coyle, Professor Victoria Traynor, Professor Valerie Wilson and Dr Samuel Lapkin



School of Nursing (SON), University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia

+61 2 4221 3339 ✉ mac335@uowmail.edu.au



BACKGROUND CONCERN AND AIMS

Qualitative inquiry can untangle complex clinical challenges. Older people are at increased risk of adverse health outcomes in hospital. This case study on the activity of 'specialling' examples research inclusiveness of older people. Evidence of 'specialling' effectiveness is scant, more needs to be known about the older person's experience and the care culture (1). Person-centred theory frames the ethnographic study and informed role clarification for the clinician observer.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fresh insight on everyday practice is facilitated as ethnographic research seeks the participants perspective, enabling their voice. Important is understanding the observer role. The tension of either being involved or distanced while observing can be embraced as a crucial way of learning and a method strength (2). The nurse researcher must negotiate the responsibilities of dual roles when collecting data in their workplace. Beneficial is a 'stepping-in' and 'stepping-out' approach.

Guidance for the clinical ethnographer to 'step-in' and 'step-out' of dual roles

Before the observation

Define role:

- Recognise dual roles
- Reduce role conflict and ambiguity, stating and restating intent to self and others

During the observation

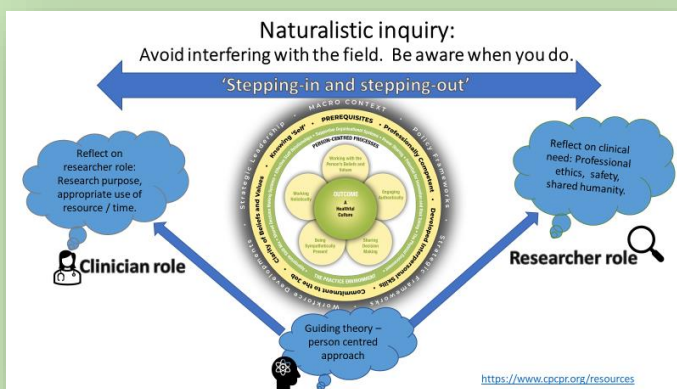
Is assistance required?

- Note discomfort in the older person, staff member or self.
- Who requires assistance (lack insight, disempowered, inexperienced, pre-occupied)?
- Is the need immediate?
- Is there a safety concern?
- Can I assist?
 - Indirectly - obtaining others.
 - Directly - participating,
 - Is participation appropriate / required to clinical scope, ethical, professional and organisational expectations?
- If not urgent and immediate – what will the impact of researcher participation be? The researcher is present to carry out ethnographic observations not impose their assumptions.

After the observation

Reflect and review on observer stance individually and with the research team:

- Alternative options and future 'stepping-in or out';
- Role clarification, boundaries created by dual roles need to be (re-)discovered with each new context; and,
- The observer impact on the field – role clarification can create opportunities to build credentials, strengthen relationships and generate reciprocal learning opportunities.



CONCLUSIONS and IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Familiarity with the research site can aid observer flexibility, adaptation and acceptance, however, role confusion can occur. Role responsiveness to the context by 'stepping-in' and 'stepping-out' facilitated ethnographic observation in the clinical setting and promoted participant engagement, including the older person and their family.

REFERENCES

1. Coyle, M. A., Wilson, V., Lapkin, S., & Traynor, V. (2020). What are we asking for when requesting "Specialling" for the confused hospitalised older person? A concept analysis. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/ohn.12302>
2. O'Reilly, K. (2011). *Ethnographic methods* / by Karen O'Reilly (2nd ed.). Routledge.