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Forward thinking: using phenomenography to explore the meaning of safety in acute mental health inpatient units

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Abstract
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Abstract

Safety is a priority in mental health services. The concept of safety in health services is commonly understood as the avoidance or reduction of harm arising from health care management or the environment in which it is delivered. This concept has been challenged by some mental health consumer groups however as being excessively oriented toward risk at the expense of therapeutic outcomes. The possibility that safety could represent something different for mental health consumers has inspired a mental health nurse to undertake a study into the meaning of safety for people who have experienced admission to an acute mental health inpatient unit. A relatively new health research approach has been used, based on its alignment with the principles of recovery-oriented mental health services. Phenomenography is a qualitative approach that has evolved from its origins in education research in the 1970s. While it is becoming more utilised in health research, the approach is not well known in mental health. The emerging elements of the study will be presented, along with an overview of the phenomenographic research approach. Deepening our understanding of consumers' perceptions and experience of safety places mental health nurses at the forefront of advocacy. By illuminating the varied meanings of safety, this study has the potential to shape the future by offering new insights with which to influence change in mental health policy, clinical practice and professional development. The study has gained Human Research ethics approval from the University of Wollongong.

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Session

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