

Life and death in a nursing home: The psychodynamics of nursing home aides' interactions with nursing home residents.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to study the experiences of nursing home aides (aides) as they described their interactions with nursing home residents (residents) while working in a skilled nursing facility (SNF). During an externship in a nursing facility I noticed that there was an inconsistency in how the nursing home residents described their lives and the aides' attitudes toward these residents' lives. This study was designed to analyze the aides' experiences as they described interactions with residents.

The nursing home literature described psychosocial conflicts of residents and the therapies used to address those problems. Although psychotherapy has shown its efficacy in treating residents' mental health/psychosocial problems the therapy most used to address these issues has been medication. Nursing home aides were described as having several universal problems such as, low pay, high turnover, lacking in training, inconsistent responses to frustration caused by residents and greater emotional stress than other health care providers. Psychoanalytic literature posited that it was unconscious feelings developed in the preverbal period of life that motivated the human response to frustration and anxiety. The unconscious fear of annihilation and the reactions to that fear would be enacted in present day dynamics that revive these early frustrations. Psychoanalytic originated Terror Management theory (TM) described empirically researched evidence that unconscious anxiety related to how the human body looks,

creates conscious and unconscious fear of death that may play a role in nursing home aides' experiences with residents.

The methodology focused on the themes that developed out of 11 videoed sessions that included five nursing home aides and the researcher. The 90 minute videoed sessions were designed using modern psychoanalytic perspectives in which the aides could describe their weekly 40 minute meetings with specifically chosen residents. The aides' comments about residents were coded, themed and analyzed according to modern psychoanalytic principles.

The results of the data uncovered five themes: environment, corporeality, management of feelings, self-revelation/identification and listening. The themes indicated unconscious archaic motivations of the aides influenced their experiences with the residents. Managing the anxiety that originates in unconscious parts of the mind appears to be one of the important contributions to the aides' experiences with the residents. Results showed that the negative parts of the aides' personalities appeared when frustration was not able to be tolerated; the residents were not like them. The aides listening to residents showed that the positive parts of the aides' personalities could emerge when the aides experienced the residents as just like them.

The results have implications for psychoanalysis and the health care industry.

