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Nurses' Experience In Caring For Patients With Traumatic Spinal Cord Injury

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SIGNED STATEMENT

I certify that the work in this thesis contains no material that has been accepted or offered for the award of any other degree or diploma from any university or other tertiary institution, and to the best of my knowledge has no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference had been made in the text.

I also certify that any assistance received in preparing in the thesis, including all the sources used, had been acknowledged within the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the School of Nursing library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore nurses' experiences when caring for patients with traumatic spinal cord injury that had neurological deficit at a spinal unit in Australia. The study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Three registered nurses and three enrolled nurses with a broad range of experience were recruited and interviewed. The data were transcribed and analysed using Burnard's (1991) 14-step approach to analysis. Four essential themes emerged: *'Nurses' interpretation of the patients and family'*, *'The passage of care'*, *'Patient needs'* and *'Hope and grief'*. The study revealed the experiences of six nurses, highlighting the passage of nursing care that the nurses underwent while caring for spinal cord injury patients. Although these patients had physical disabilities and were dependent physically, the nurses in this study showed that their concern and attentiveness was directed more towards fulfilling their patients' psychological needs. During the acute phase, the nurses identified patients that were going through the process of grief. They believe in providing patients with hope in order to motivate them to move on in their lives; however, they knew that giving false hope may have a negative impact. Finally, the experience of caring for these patients and going through the passage of care gave the nurses the opportunity to understand their patients and their families. This suggests that the time spent with patients and their families gave the nurses a broader understanding of them, which in the long term helped the nurses to plan the care for future patients, and at the same time help their families to go through the traumatic life changes resulting from their family member's injury.