

Patient life in hospital

A qualitative study of informal relationships between hospitalised patients

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ABSTRACT

Within a patientology framework, this PhD dissertation is about an empirical study on patient life that provides insight into the nature of informal relationships between patients in hospitals today. The study was carried out at Aarhus University Hospital, Aarhus Hospital.

The purpose was to explore how informal relationships between patients affect their hospital experiences in the hospital. The assumption is that on the one hand the impacts on patients' suffering affect the way they act and experience encounters with fellow patients for good or for bad during hospitalisation, while on the other hand there also is a basis for healing processes to happen to patients when they engage in mutual relationships with fellow patients.

The study is designed within a phenomenological-hermeneutical philosophic frame of reference and is based on ethnographic fieldwork among hospitalised patients in a gastroenterological department. Data were collected through participant observations over a period of 18 months. Nine males and nine females were selected for qualitative interviews. The analysis involved a phenomenological hermeneutic analytical three-stage method.

The personal experience of waiting expresses itself in patients' interactions and behaviour that communicate an emplotted message of waiting. The most basic tool for emplotting the encounters between patients with the message that we are in an awaiting position and obliged to stay here for a while, is a specific set of behaviours that patients perform. The emplotment of

waiting is communicated as a frame within which minor plots appear.

These plots are created through stories about three roughly framed aspects of hospitalisation: A) Being together with fellow patients entails a constant dilemma, B) relationships between patients are restricted and extended, and C) shifting perspectives in solidarity.

The study shows that patients' hospitalisation is strongly connected to time and space. Time is an important factor in the development of patient relationships, as patients are constantly in an awaiting position, where the potential for building relationships is present, although it can be a difficult process when it happens.

The space between patients in the various hospital wards gives a varied potential for mutuality and the development of relationships. When patients build these informal relationships, they may make possible the intensifying of their wellbeing and possibly improve healing processes within themselves when they engage in mutual relationships. Patients form informal communities within the hospital setting although these may be difficult to identify for outsiders. Despite the fact that they are of great importance for patients when experienced they are not easily initiated.

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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