

A space of their own - Manchester's Early Critical Care Nurses – an oral history project

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Aims

- to explore the reminiscence of retired critical care nurses from one English ICU
- to present a narrative analysis and produce an original contribution to the history of critical care
- to capture voices that will form a legacy when preserved in a nursing archive



Background

Currently there is no British history of critical care told from the nurses' perspective

Wellcome Witnesses to Twentieth Century Medicine - History of British Intensive Care, c.1950-c.2000

'if you did a nursing/ITU seminar, you'd get another perspective and more nurses attending'

Graham Haynes RN (2010)



Method

- Oral history (qualitative historical)
- Archival research
- Purposive sample
(NMGH CCU 1967-2000)

13 retired nurses (3 men)
1 retired intensivist

Interviewed between October 2019
& September 2021 (6 remotely)

Thematic narrative analysis



University of Manchester ethical approval November 2018

Location

North Manchester General Hospital (NMGH)

Pilot-unit 1967 (2-bed)

Permanent unit 1969 (8-bed)

Coronary care 1972 (6-bed)

Renal unit 1975 (3-bed)

Critical care 1999 (8-bed ICU/14-bed HDU)

[2024 – 12 bed critical care]



Three Key Themes

- **Boundaries & Barriers**

isolated, self-sufficient, experimental,
new look, misconceptions and elitism

- **Connections & Cohesion**

candid, collaborative, cutting-edge,
close critical care family, early outreach,
ICU transfer service

- **Routines & Relationships**

youthful nurse leadership, competent,
challenged stereotypes, seamlessly melded
technology with nursing care



Boundaries & Barriers

The
Star Trek unit
(David)

The locked
door
(Dianne)

We didn't mix that much I
suppose, because it was such a
drag to get changed to go down
to the dining room and things
(Patricia)



Boundaries & Barriers

'There they go again, ICU,
can't bloody walk anywhere'

(Mark)

Some of them thought we were a
bunch of renegades and we
should be closed down
immediately. It's a bit like what
did people think of punk. We
were punk nurses...we were the
Sex Pistols

(Hugh)

We were left alone a lot... the
managers didn't know enough... it
was so new ... the managers didn't
bother us

(Patricia)



Connections & Cohesion

On the wards I don't think you'd be on first name terms ... they were part of the team

(Ann)

junior doctors were very junior...took a lot of direction from the... experienced nurses

(Sally)

it wouldn't be unusual to be doing care... and say: "*Can you just give me a lift here?*" [doctors] would get their sleeves rolled up

(Patricia)



Connections & Cohesion

You could always phone him...He said: "*Well what do you think?*" You said: "*Well, I've got a feeling*". He'd be in
(Dianne)

nobody was any better than anybody else...all part of that team
(Ann)

Different from what I expected...there was banter
(Sally)



Routines & Relationships

you'd look at what patients ...
look at your staff, they were all
qualified, how good they were
(Dianne)

sickness...nights...two
RNs running the eight
beds ...not enough
(Hugh)

most of the sisters...age
...about twenty-five...
ENB 100... widened your
horizons
(Elizabeth)



Routines & Relationships

It was an elite of knowledge,
not...power or status...the SENs
were so knowledgeable

(Mark)

the same ...one
of the nurses
(Janet)

*'Are you sure you
don't mean
doctor?'*

(Mark)

I didn't fear the machines...[or] ever
became someone who *lost* a
patient...always saw [the] person

(Sally)



Conclusion & Contribution

‘A space of their own’ – arguably the first UK study to examine the history of one critical care unit from the nurses’ perspective

**Innovative – Driven – Collegiate
Patient Focused - Pragmatic**

Do you ‘see’ you?



Thank you for listening

I thought, can I make a bigger contribution to my profession? ...And the cutting edge as I saw it then was in critical care

.....

I've always wanted to be able to demonstrate to the outside world that nurses are capable of more than anybody would ever dream of... not just being nice and cuddly... it's about the intellectual thing as well

(Hugh)

**Any
Questions?**

References

Reynolds L. A; and Tansey E. M. (eds). (2011). History of British Intensive Care c.1950 – c. 2000. Wellcome Witnesses to Twentieth Century Medicine. Queen Mary University of London: London



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