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The experiences of registered nurses in caring for people with intellectual developmental disability in the acute care context in Australia

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Statement of the Problem: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 charter requires that health professionals provide care of the same quality to persons with disabilities as to others. People with Intellectual Developmental Disability (IDD) are a diverse group with a complexity of healthcare needs. In the acute care environment, behavioural problems and communication difficulties can be exacerbated for a number of reasons and pose a challenge to all staff. In difference continues to be reported in the literature, resulting in negative hospital experiences and poorer health outcomes across the globe for people with IDD. In Australia, training is lacking in developmental disability care, and it was unknown how nurses know how to care for this patient cohort.

Methodology: A descriptive phenomenological approach based on the works of Husserl was selected to best answer the research question. Following university ethics approval, participants were sourced from advertisements in national nursing magazines, Facebook, and word of mouth. Twelve (12) willing participants were interviewed, and transcribed data was analysed using Colliuzzi's seven step data analytical process.

Findings: Participants described a number of challenges, one of which was concern that some colleagues were observed to be less engaged, effecting negative patient experiences and impacting on staff workloads. This professional dilemma led to advocacy for some, whilst others felt powerless to effect change. Participants described the need for education and training, as well as unified services across a facility that offers direction for all.

Conclusion & Significance: Zero tolerance is the expectation for other areas in the workplace. Institutions that allow staff to adopt indifference toward people with IDD must be challenged. Universities and health care organizations are responsible for ensuring equity of care for people with IDD as a human rights issue. Recommendations are made for developmental disability liaison nurses, and improved admission and discharge planning processes across facilities at a national level.

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