

## **Ethical challenges in qualitative health research: positioning the self as nurse researcher**

This paper presents some of the ethical challenges I have experienced in researching with registered nurse participants, who like me, had cared for a dying family member in palliative care. The research was inspired by my curiosity about what it was like for other nurses living within their family and community as a nurse and how they managed the complexities caring for a dying family member brought to their lives. Interviewing other nurses made me realize how much I shared the participants' culture as a nurse with similar language, relationships and experiences. While shared identities and experiences offer qualitative nurse researchers particular skills and insights, as the research progressed I realized that I was having trouble asking the 'hard to ask' questions in the research interviews.

The ethics oriented practice of self care, developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, offers ideas about how nurses might create themselves as thoughtful and self critical qualitative researchers. Foucault's notion of care of the self is an important reflexive strategy because it gives precedence to thinking critically about how the self as nurse researcher engages with participants and research data. Making the self and one's actions the object of critique creates sensitivity to how we think, where knowledge is understood as an effect of past experiences and the frames of reference used to interpret them. This self conscious scrutiny generates deeper understanding about how possibilities for different ways of conducting the research might have been foreclosed by our own thoughts and actions.

### **Key words:**

Reflexivity, nursing, research ethics, care of the self