

2012 UNIVERSITY ANNUAL LEARNING & TEACHING CONFERENCE

2012 & Beyond

Afternoon Oral Bites

13:55 – 14:30

Taking care with words: poetry as a model for communication skills with older people

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Abstract:

This paper outlines a project supported by the Innovations in Student Learning Scheme and describes progress to date.

A recent report by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has highlighted once again the importance of nurses' communication skills for the dignity and well-being of older people. The aim of our project is to increase nurses' understanding, knowledge and skill in the use of language when interacting with older people. We have appointed a poet-in-residence to work alongside student nurses, mentors, and a group of older people with the objective of increasing our sensitivity to the power of language, understanding the impact of language on the well-being of older people, and creatively exploring the use of language in professional relationships with older people. The appointment of a poet-in-residence is a novel approach in nursing. The rationale behind this project is that poets are particularly sensitive to the nuanced meanings of words and will enable us to develop skills in the creative and insightful use of language with older people.

The presentation will outline the main approach for the project and activity to date which involves three workshops, and a final celebration event. The project objectives are:

- To listen to older people's experiences of the use of words in hospital, residential and community settings.
- Working together, to share experiences in order to understand the impact of words when working with older people – terms of endearment, 'elder-speak'; and the relationships between language, power and control.
- To learn how to use words creatively to promote dignity and enhance well-being.
- To make a creative response to these issues, suitable for display, reading or performance in the display space of the FHSC at the end of the project.

The presentation will also demonstrate how the project builds on previous work by the lead presenter, drawing on research into nurses' use of 'terms of endearment' with older people (Brown and Draper 2003, Draper 2005), and more recent work on the poetics of nursing practice (Draper 2011). The project also contributes to the user and carer strategy of the FHSC which is led by Sandra Burley, and it draws on Jane Wray's work with vulnerable people.