

## ORIGINAL PAPER

### Poetic Transcription to Explore the Concept of Caring

**Judy E. Davidson DNP RN FCCM**

Director Research Integration and Management, Scripps Health, 11025 N. Torrey Pines Rd, La Jolla, CA

**Lori Burnell, PhD RN**

Vice President, Nurse Executive and Operations. Scripps Mercy Hospital, San Diego, CA

**Liz Devin**

Coordinator, Performance Improvement, Scripps Mercy Hospital, San Diego, CA

**Renada Rochon, MS RN,**

Assistant Nurse Manager, Trauma. Scripps Mercy Hospital, San Diego, CA

**Cynde VanWyk, BSN RN,**

Director of Emergency Services. Scripps Mercy Hospital, Chula Vista, CA

**Mary Virgen, MS RN,**

Director of Maternal Child Health, Scripps Mercy Hospital, Chula Vista, CA

**Corresponding author:** Judy E. Davidson DNP RN FCCM , Director Research Integration and Management, Scripps Health, 11025 N. Torrey Pines Rd, La Jolla, CA 619 243 6902. davidson.judy@scrippshealth.org

#### Abstract

**Aims:** To explore Sister Simone Roach's caring model using poetry to illustrate real life nursing exemplars. These poems also served as a means of recognizing and teaching nurses about caring practices typical to their workplace.

**Background:** The organization had recently adopted Sr. Simone Roach's caring model. This project was done in an attempt to translate the caring model into poems using exemplars of nurses within the organization.

**Methodology:** Poetic transcription, a form of qualitative research, engages people in reflective learning and serves as a 'way of knowing'. After IRB approval and consent, poems were created from exemplars about nurse of the year candidates. Member-checking was performed to review the poem with participants and revise until accepted by the nurse. The poems were sent to Sr. Simone Roach who provided written confirmation for the method used to transform her theory into a format understood by the practicing nurse. Poems were coupled with a professional photograph to add a visual dimension to the project.

**Results:** Eighty-five nurse-of-the-year candidates were approached to participate in the study over the course of 3 years during 2009-2011. Two nurses declined consent. Poems were displayed alongside a professional picture of the candidate. The poems were shared during a celebratory luncheon, posted to the website, described in a newsletter, shared as reflections, and used for training in orientation.

**Conclusions:** This novel approach was a well-received methodology for translating the caring model into practice. The research was a successful means of recognition, education, and reflection.

**Keywords:** Nursing, Caring, Qualitative Research, Poetic Transcription, Employee recognition, Nursing Theory

## Background

Poetry is an expression or interpretation of human experience. Poetic transcription may illustrate and sense rather than simply tell others about the research phenomenon under review. The reader is drawn into an intense state of connectedness to the topic with hopes of facilitating a deeper immersion into the thought or concept under study (Lapum, 2005; Madill & Hopper, 2007). Poetry allows for a common understanding of the unique process of being in the world under the circumstances described (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Shapiro, 2004). Poetry may enhance the understanding of a concept in a manner not found in prose, "useful in shaping understandings about the inherent challenges and contradictions of the position" (Macneal, 2000). Since poems are brief and oft times carry a rhythmic cadence, they may speak to a distinct subset of individuals who may benefit from less traditional forms of instruction (Furman, 2006; Glesne, 1997; Lapum, 2005).

Poetic transcription has been used to explore vigilance in family members of oncology patients (Carr, 2003), perspectives on men's health (Madill & Hopper, 2007), the lived experience of women (Duffy & Aquino-Russell, 2007), African-American women with cancer (Kookan, Haase, & Russell, 2007), those who experienced a loss of appetite (Souter, 2005), and those who required mechanical ventilation support (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009). In a paper entitled "Caring or uncaring – Meanings of being in an oncology environment" (Edvardsson, Sandman, & Rasmussen, 2006), caring was examined following interviews with staff, patients, and significant others. The findings of this study provided insights about the effect of the environment on patient's healing.

According to Lapum (2005), some forms of evidence are ill suited for quantification. Additionally, those contributing to this study discovered through a previous attempt that quantifying caring through survey research was insufficient in truly conveying a sense of knowing surrounding the question, "What is a caring nurse?" (Burnell & Agan, 2011). Subsequently, a qualitative approach to understand caring in this study was attempted using poetry to express the data analysis.

The words taken from exemplars in the form of poetry were meant to capture the essence of being a caring nurse. Subsequently, these poems were used to educate nurses and others to actual examples of caring in the profession of nursing. In this research, poems were written to illustrate caring practices aligned with the central concepts of the recently adopted caring model by Sr. Roach (2007) and paired alongside a professional photograph of the nurse. It was not known at the beginning of the study whether poetry could be successfully written from pre-existing exemplars. Additionally, individual nurses' appreciation of this type of poetry written through the voice of another was also an unknown factor. Though poetry has been used as a form of instruction (Raingruber, 2009) and known to "cultivate a mindset of reflection" (p. 1753), poetry for recognition, teaching, or reflective purposes was an aspect of this type of research that had yet to be explored.

## Aims

The Division of Nursing adopted the theoretical framework of Sr. Simone Roach's caring model (Roach, 2007) to serve as the foundation for nursing professionalism and practice. Sr. Roach organized caring according to the six *C's* of compassion, competence, confidence, conscience, commitment, and comportment. Each year, the membership of the Nurse Practice Council solicits written exemplars of exceptional bedside nurses prior to Nurses Week. These exemplars were submitted as narratives depicting how each Nurse-of-the-Year candidate typified the six *C's* as part of his or her practice. The purpose of this research was to translate these exemplars into poetry reflective of Sr. Roach's caring model. For presentation, each nurse's poem was coupled with a professional photograph. The poetry in this research project was also used for teaching, nurse recognition, and reflection.

## Significance

In a phenomenological study on compassionate care from the patient's perspective, "most patients mentioned the word *caring* as essential to compassionate care in their stories, insights, and responses to the researcher's inquiries.

Indeed, the public as well as nurses have traditionally viewed caring as foundational to the nursing profession" (Burnell, 2011, pp., p.70; Glesne, 1997). According to Watson (1988), a renowned caring theorist, "during the past decade, the concepts of care and caring have gained greater awareness and emphasis in nursing literature and research" (p. 175). Job satisfaction for a nurse is fundamentally associated with the provision of exemplary patient care; the literature is replete with examples equating caring to patient satisfaction and ultimately to a nurse's job satisfaction (Aiken et al., 2011; Utriainen & Kyngas, 2009). The significance of this study was to gain additional insight into the question, 'What is a caring nurse?' within the theoretical underpinnings of Sr. Roach's (2007) caring model.

### Methodology

This qualitative research study was performed using poetic transcription coupled with photography. Glesne (1997) encouraged words describing the participant, not the researcher, and juxtaposed to the original interview while maintaining enough of the language to capture the participant's "speaking rhythm" (p.205). Alternatively, poets in this study used the exemplar written in the voice of the person nominating the Nurse of the Year candidate and at times intrinsic knowledge about that individual also contributed to the composition. Poems were written by a variety of poets, each with their own worldview and expressions of caring practices intended to inspire a broader audience (Madill & Hopper, 2007). An assortment of poetic structures was employed intentionally. Free text verse provided a rich description of caring while more compressed forms, such as tanka and haiku, served to highlight a more salient point regarding caring. A strongly metered verse, such as a limerick, drew readers in with the power of a chant (Furman, 2006; Lapum, 2005; Shapiro, 2004).

Understanding poetry may help the reader visualize and feel the emotion of the human experience of caring (Kookan, et al., 2007; Lapum, 2005; Madill & Hopper, 2007). To further enhance each presentation, a photograph of the actual nurse was purposefully positioned alongside the poem and used to create a depth of appreciation for "What is a caring nurse?" cultivating a stronger attachment to

readers who might know that particular nurse or identify with someone like him or her (e.g., culture, gender, age). Photography has been used to explore caring in women with cancer (Gates, Lackey, & Brown, 2001), teaching health assessment skills to nursing students (Pardue, 2005), and exploring the concept of hope (de Turner & Cox, 2004).

### Participants

The project was conducted in a 700-bed urban hospital with two campuses under one license. Staff from every department voted for a Nurse-of-the-Year candidate using established criteria. For 3 consecutive years, the criteria included evidence of caring according to Sr. Roach's (2007) caring model. Once a department selected their specific Nurse-of-the-Year candidate, the manager composed an exemplar, forwarding the submission to the Nurse Practice Council. Exemplars were de-identified through a structured review process and a grand Nurse of the Year was selected to represent each hospital campus. For the purposes of research, every departmental Nurse-of-the-Year candidate was approached for voluntary consent into the study. It was carefully explained in the consent process that poetry was intended to recognize them individually and therefore personal identity would *be made known*. Eighty-five nurses were approached over the course of 3 years with two declinations, resulting in 83 participants for whom a poem was written and photograph taken.

### Data Collection

After obtaining informed consent, the list of Nurse-of-the-Year candidates was divided among the available poets, either volunteers from the hospital staff or poets known by hospital staff. The poets contributed their work voluntarily. Exemplars were distributed along with the preferred e-mail address of the nurse they were commissioned to describe. After the poems were written, they were sent via e-mail to the participant by the lead author (JD) with a voting button to accept, reject, or revise each submission. Each year, one participant offered feedback for revision. The hospital's medical photographer took a head shot of each candidate by appointment. No poems were rejected. The poems and photographs were then assembled into a presentation. Participants were encouraged to invite

a guest to the Nurse-of-the-Year celebration luncheon where the poems were presented publically for the first time. One member of the participant's unit management team was also invited to the event. The Senior Executive Team, a chaplain, and the Chiefs of Staff were also invited.

### **Ethical Protection**

This study was conducted under IRB approval and with signed informed consent. The primary researcher reinforced that participation was voluntary and neither refusal nor agreement to participate would affect their employment or Nurse-of-the-Year status.

### **Credibility and Legitimacy Issues**

Trustworthiness and credibility were tested in two dimensions; first with the participants of the study to make sure that the resultant poem described their caring practices appropriately, and secondly with Sr. Simone Roach, theorist, to assure that the poems reflected the precepts within her caring model. In an article entitled, "Can poetry be data?" Johanna Shapiro (2004) supposed "poetry continues to survive as a mode of expression because we recognize that it has the capability to create useful, credible, and trustworthy truths that are hard to discover in other ways" (p. 174). Trustworthiness and credibility are central elements of qualitative research. In this study, each participant was given the opportunity to accept, reject, or revise their poem until they were satisfied with the composition. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study. In addition, each set of poems with associated photographs was sent to Sr. Roach, nurse theorist and author of the caring model under study. Following review of the first year's poems, she sent written approval and praise acknowledging this method of translating her caring model into a form staff nurses could easily understand and relay (personal communication, September 6, 2009).

### **Results/Discussion**

**Poetry** Poems were constructed to the satisfaction of all 83 participants. It was possible to construct the poetry from exemplars, in some cases augmented by personal knowledge of the participants' caring practices. In contrast to what has previously been

described in the literature (Glesne, 1997), we found that the intimate connection with the participant developed through the consenting and writing process, as well as using the voice of the participants peer's to describe the caring practices of the honoree (vs. the participant's own voice) had a powerful positive effect on the participant in the form of pride in recognition.

### **Utility for recognition**

This project was scheduled strategically as an integral portion of the organization's Nurses Week events. Formalizing a research-based structure for the project was thought to elevate the milieu surrounding the celebration. Following a catered lunch, the program commenced with a description of poetic transcription as research and how the researchers used this opportunity to write poems and photograph nurses who routinely demonstrated excellence in caring according to the theoretical model of Sr. Roach (2007). This introduction set the stage as a professional event, setting it apart from the free-cookies-and-ice-cream-sundae stations that are common recognition events held during Nurses Week. Participants were called up individually while a nurse administrator recited their poem; each one received a framed copy along with their professional photograph. At the conclusion of the reading, participants passed through a reception line of administrators and another professional picture was taken. The poetry was also sent to the recipients electronically. In all 3 years, the poems were received with positive feedback from physicians, administrators, staff, Nurse-of-the-Year candidates, and their families. Many participants and audience members would tear up as the poems were read. By keeping the poems brief enough to fit on one slide, the entire poetry reading comprised 25 minutes from start to finish. In the third year, a professional spoken-word poet (RF) wrote and presented the two grand Nurse-of-the-Year winners. He concluded the readings to thunderous applause. Instead of requesting a waiver of written consent, the investigators reflected that the consenting portion of the process would be as important as the final product; their prediction proved to be accurate. In the first year, 25:27 of the participating nurses as well as 3:5 poets declared this as their first experience with nursing research.

Notably, during the consent process most participants' posture straightened, smiled, took a big breath, and looked down in humility while accepting their poem. Several of them made a graceful statement about the importance of being honored by their peers.

The response however, was not universally positive. In Year 2 and Year 3, one participant per year declined to consent. This subset of recipients chose to shy away from public recognition associated with the poetry or a traditional celebration.

An important finding associated with this research was the gratification recipients expressed from hearing their colleagues considering them as caring in the manner reflected in the poetry. In contrast to the advice and methods advocated by previous authors (Carr, 2003; Glesne, 1997), using a voice one-step removed from the participant may yield a stronger sense of recognition than if the poet had interviewed the candidate firsthand.

#### **Utility for teaching**

During the consenting process, some participants were unaware that the department of nursing had adopted Sr. Roach's (2007) theoretical model. Consequently, the process of consenting also became a teachable moment in explaining the central tenets of the six C's model. During the celebration, the introduction served as enlightenment into the process of poetic transcription and reinforced this caring theory to the audience. The poems themselves provided exemplars of caring in action. Furthermore, staff development specialists selected several poems to be highlighted during new employee orientation. The poems were posted to the website and appeared in various hospital communications. The poets believed these exemplars were instrumental in teaching caring concepts through actual occurrences.

#### **Utility for reflection**

Leaders from various departments were encouraged to use these poems as reflections in staff meetings. The poems served to bring professional pride and effectively set the mood of the meetings.

#### **Limitations**

This is a qualitative study and the initial exploration of the use of poetry for this purpose. There was no quantification of knowledge transfer regarding Sr. Simone Roach's caring model, which could serve as the focus of a future study. The poetry was written from pre-existing material rather than from direct interview. This was a single-site study conducted in Southern California of nurses and therefore may not be generalizable to other geographic areas or professions.

#### **Implications**

Poetic transcription may be used to create a deep and common understanding of the human emotion surrounding caring practices. This form of research has implications for other aspects of healthcare. The act of performing the study exposed nurses to the research process. A sense of professional pride was generated and extended to the participants, poets, nurses' family members, and hospital staff working closely with the honorees. The research-infused celebration elevated the level of Nurse's Week professionalism and was engaging to staff, families, administrators, and physicians.

#### **Conclusion and Clinical Resources**

The authors of this manuscript propose poetic transcription as an effective mechanism to explore caring practices with practicing nurses. Using examples from the workplace aided to bridge theory into the practice setting. The resultant poems could be used as clinical resources for recognition, teaching, and reflection. Pairing poems with photographs further enhanced the impact of this creative research project.

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## Poems

### Janice Juan

It happened so quickly while driving  
 I can't remember my name  
 I see many lights staring at me  
 I hear beeps and mechanical noises  
 A feeling of fear surrounds me  
 My heart speeds it's tempo  
 I want to yell but I can't  
 I want to move and I am stone  
 I thought "My God am I dying, or  
 Is this a terrible nightmare?"  
 Then suddenly I feel a peace within me  
 A gentle human touch on my chest  
 A voice so soft and kindly  
 Revives my heart and soul  
 I now feel a sense of security  
 Because of that one nurse who saw what I  
 needed

And with her kindness restored me

**Legend:** In this first poem, the poet wrote in first person from the patient's point of view. She contrasted the patient's fearful state of semi-consciousness in the emergency department with the comforting presence of this nurse to give a greater emotional impact.

### Candace Winter

Benevolent  
 A nurse that has mastered the science of  
 compassion,  
 A true symbol of being ardent, altruistic, and  
 benevolent,  
 The keeper of a wonderful soul walking the  
 path of selfless devotion,  
 Instiller of hope and trust, empathetic to  
 human emotion,  
 Giving to those within and beyond the  
 hospital walls,  
 Through the channels of charity,  
 Commitment to nursing as the light guiding  
 her to life's clarity,  
 One who has found the key to happiness,  
 through the path of nursing,

An energetic leader, a caring teacher, strong  
 and confident,  
 Humbled by the one who is compassionate  
 and benevolent.

**Legend:** The poem regarding Candace, is a decastich, a poem of ten lines. Its irregular meter coupled with rhyme help move the reader from line to line, and spotlight Candace's excellent qualities and achievements. Word repetition emphasizes her compassion and benevolence, and helps unify the whole.

### Renae Kuhlman

Her calming presence  
 Inspires all those in her care,  
 Fledgling nurses, and  
 Patients striving for the light.  
 She listens, and is trusted.

**Legend:** In a lengthy exemplar written by her manager, Renae's active listening skills and calm were at the heart of her nomination. The poetic goal was to link the importance of these two characteristics to both her patients and to the young nurses she mentored. Tanka is a traditional non-rhyming Japanese poetry form of specific length. Its brevity allowed for very concentrated focus as well as optimal projections on a PowerPoint slide.

### Shaundra

Shaunda McClung  
 A sheltering tree,  
 Comforting and encouraging.  
 As her heartening strength supports her  
 patients,  
 She receives their gift of gratitude for her  
 expert care.  
 Her arms reach out to embrace the world,  
 And she shares the fruits of her experience  
 with all.  
 Learner and teacher,  
 A blessing and a nurse,  
 A sheltering tree,  
 Shaunda McClung

**Legend:** The author searched for a metaphor that would encompass the complex characteristics of Shaundra's exemplar as no single theme emerged. Fruit trees seemed appropriate as they cycle sunlight and water into shade, shelter, fruit, oxygen, and beauty. The poet tried to arrange the words in an apple-tree shape to help reinforce the give and take between Shaundra and her patients, the physical and spiritual blessing each receives from the other.

### Sharon Marcelo

Henry Ford once said  
 Coming together is the beginning  
 Keeping together is progress  
 And working together is success  
 I was told  
 Individually, we are one drop  
 But, together we are an ocean  
 Sharon  
 You believe in teamwork  
 You'll cover a shift when a co-worker has an emergency  
 You'll bandage confidence when self-esteem is wounded  
 Sharon  
 You carry compassion in your voice  
 Reassurance in your words  
 And confidence in your walk  
 Sharon  
 You are a gift  
 Beautifully wrapped  
 Inside of a Nurse's uniform

### Leticia Artates

I was told  
 That an empty wagon makes the most noise  
 My mother said  
 The loudest one in the room  
 Is probably doing the least amount of work  
 Letty  
 Sometimes we forget to honor people like you

Those who finish their assignments quietly  
 Those who don't spend half of the workday complaining  
 Those who have a conscience  
 And a courageous spirit to match  
 Those who carry the world on their shoulders  
 And tell us that it's really not that heavy  
 Letty  
 Your sincerity  
 Is a hug with perfect timing  
 Your confidence  
 Is an ignition that you turn on every time you walk into a room  
 And your commitment  
 Is an inspiration to all those who see you

**Legend:** The previous two poems are spoken word poems. As the name suggests, spoken word is meant to be experienced aloud. The poet uses rhythm to reinforce each individual nurse's excellence, and her contribution to the whole.

### Marty Hawley

#### Caring

For the most vulnerable of patients

#### Sharing

Experience and knowledge with many

#### Bearing

The burden of a family compromised

#### Marty

A career dedicated to the health and wellbeing of new life

**Legend:** A list poem with a rhyming word *introducing* each line most amply described Marty's role as a veteran nurse dedicated to caring for *new beginnings, new life*. Her exemplar highlighted her genuine advocacy for premature infants and their families and served as the inspiration for this short verse about Marty.

**Sheryl Foss-Bjornsen**

When a colleague struggles,  
When a heart hurts,  
When hope fades,  
When resolution seems impossible,  
When societal behavior devastates,  
When agony takes hold,  
When darkness envelops,  
When joy diminishes.  
Sheryl is there with compassion,  
Undivided in attention,  
Cherished, selfless, unwavering,  
Caregiver, peer, volunteer,  
Competent, confidant, and committed,  
The consummate nursing professional

**Legend:** Free verse poetry was employed to describe the unique expertise of this behavioral health nursing expert. This form of poetry refrains from consistent meter patterns, rhyme, or any other musical pattern. Like those she cares for, predictability of those with mental illness, is a challenge and for Sheryl, her calling.