

**AN INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS THAT DETERMINE
SELF-REPORTED KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES,
AND CLINICAL BEHAVIOURS OF PRACTISING
REGISTERED NURSES TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH
ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUG-RELATED
PROBLEMS**

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	15
DECLARATION	17
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	18
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 ATOD-Related Problems: How Big is the Problem?	
1.2 The Role of Nurses in Responding to Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Problems	
1.3 Context	
1.4 Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Knowledge Among Nurses	
1.5 Nurses' Attitudes Towards Patients with Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Problems	
1.5.1 <i>Measurement of Nurses' Professional Attitudes Towards Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Problems</i>	
1.6 Nurses' Clinical Practices for Identification and Intervention for Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Problems.....	
1.6.1 <i>The "Rhetorical Gap" - Between Ideal and Actual Practice</i>	
1.6.2 <i>Development of Measures of Self-Reported Clinical Behaviours</i>	
1.7 Nurse Education and Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Problems	
1.8 The New South Wales Strategic Plan for Nurse Education and Nursing Management	
1.9 Evaluating the State Strategic Plan	
1.10 A Mass Population Survey of the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Knowledge, Therapeutic Attitudes and Core Clinical Behaviours of Nurses Practising in New South Wales	
1.10.1 <i>Aims and Objectives of the State-Wide Survey</i>	

1.11	Purpose of This Thesis
1.11.1	<i>Summary</i>
1.11.2	<i>Research Questions</i>
1.11.3	<i>Significance of the Study</i>
1.12	Organisation of This Thesis
	<i>Chapter One - Introduction/Background</i>
	<i>Chapter Two - Method.....</i>
	<i>Chapter Three - Quantitative Analysis: Results</i>
	<i>Chapter Four - Discussion of Major Findings: Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug-Related Knowledge and Therapeutic Attitudes</i>
	<i>Chapter Five - Clinical Activity: Responses of Registered Nurses to Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Problems.....</i>
	<i>Chapter Six - The Numbers Add Up... But</i>
	<i>Chapter Seven - Nurses, Their Workplace, Work Mates, and ATOD Interventions.....</i>
	<i>Chapter Eight - Conclusions and Recommendations</i>

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

2.1	Introduction.....
2.2	Combination of Methods
2.3	Quantitative Data
2.3.1	<i>Survey Methodology</i>
2.3.1.1	<i>Developmental Phase 1992-93</i>
2.3.1.2	<i>Questionnaire Development</i>
2.3.1.3	<i>Pilot Questionnaire</i>
	<i>Demographics.....</i>
	<i>Alcohol and Other Drug Related Knowledge and Skills</i>
	<i>Therapeutic Attitudes.....</i>
2.3.2	<i>Pilot Study 1: Pilot Survey of Attitudes, Beliefs and Knowledge – Orana/Far West Health Region of New South Wales</i>
2.3.2.1	<i>Establishing the Study</i>
2.3.2.2	<i>Objectives of Pilot Survey.....</i>
2.3.2.3	<i>Sample.....</i>
2.3.2.4	<i>Questionnaire Distribution and Collection</i>
2.3.2.5	<i>Recruitment.....</i>
2.3.2.6	<i>Response Rate.....</i>
2.3.2.7	<i>Findings.....</i>
2.4	Developmental Phase 1993-1994
2.4.1	<i>First Revision of Questionnaire</i>
	<i>Knowledge Items.....</i>
	<i>Attitude Items</i>
	<i>Nursing Protocol and Procedure Items</i>
	<i>Clinical Activity Items</i>
2.4.2	<i>Pilot 2: Revised Questionnaire #1</i>
2.4.3	<i>Pilot 3: Revised Questionnaire # 2.....</i>
2.4.4	<i>Final Version of the Questionnaire</i>
	<i>Items.....</i>

2.5	New South Wales State-Wide Survey
2.5.1	<i>Methods.....</i>
2.5.2	<i>Method 1 - Face-to-Face Recruitment at Ward Level</i>
2.5.3	<i>Method 2 - Mass Postal Survey</i>
2.5.3.1	<i>Sample Size.....</i>
2.5.3.2	<i>Survey Administration.....</i>
2.5.4	<i>Strategies Used to Increase Response Rate</i>
2.5.5	<i>Response Rate</i>
2.5.6	<i>Coding of Responses.....</i>
2.5.7	<i>Data Management</i>
2.6	Data Preparation and Analysis.....
2.6.1	<i>Measures of Knowledge</i>
2.6.1.1	<i>Scoring.....</i>
2.6.2	<i>Therapeutic Attitudes - Scale Development.....</i>
2.6.2.1	<i>Factor Analysis.....</i>
2.6.3	<i>Therapeutic Attitude Scale.....</i>
2.6.3.1	<i>Reliability Analysis</i>
2.6.3.2	<i>Scale Administration</i>
2.6.3.3	<i>Scoring.....</i>
2.6.4	<i>Clinical Activity - Scale Development.....</i>
2.6.4.1	<i>Factor Analysis.....</i>
2.6.5	<i>Clinical Activity Scale.....</i>
2.6.5.1	<i>Reliability Analysis</i>
2.6.5.2	<i>Scale Administration</i>
2.6.5.3	<i>Scoring.....</i>
2.7	Data Analysis/Statistical Methods
2.8	Qualitative Data
2.8.1	<i>Background: Pilot Study.....</i>
2.8.2	<i>Content Analysis: Pilot Study.....</i>
2.8.2.1	<i>Factors Located Within the Nurse.....</i>
2.8.2.2	<i>Factors Located Within the Patient</i>
2.8.2.3	<i>Factors Located Within the Workplace.....</i>
2.8.2.4	<i>Factors Located Within Other Health Care Providers</i>
2.8.2.5	<i>Factors Located Within the Social/Cultural Context.....</i>
2.8.2.6	<i>Comments and Concerns Regarding Nursing Practice.....</i>
2.8.2.7	<i>Ethical Issues Arising from the Participants Responses</i>
2.8.2.8	<i>Quantification of Qualitative Responses.....</i>
2.9	Qualitative Analysis: Method
2.9.1	<i>Content Analysis – Preliminary Thematic Coding</i>
2.9.2	<i>Content Analysis – The Sample as a Whole and The Whole of The Sample</i>
2.9.3	<i>Socio-Demographic Identifiers.....</i>
2.9.4	<i>Selection of Qualitative Responses.....</i>
2.9.5	<i>Process of Review</i>
2.10	Final Thematic Coding Frame

CHAPTER THREE: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS - RESULTS.....

3.1	Demographics.....
3.1.1	<i>Introduction.....</i>
	<i>Registered Nurses.....</i>
3.1.2	<i>Gender and Age.....</i>
3.1.3	<i>Length of Service.....</i>
3.1.4	<i>Current Clinical Area of Work.....</i>
3.1.5	<i>Current Clinical Position.....</i>
3.1.6	<i>Work Status.....</i>
3.1.7	<i>Use of the Nursing Procedure Manual.....</i>
3.1.8	<i>Seeking Clinical Advice.....</i>
3.1.9	<i>Educational Behaviour.....</i>
3.1.10	<i>Use of Tobacco and Alcohol.....</i>
	<i>Alcohol Consumption.....</i>
3.1.11	<i>Personal Experience.....</i>
3.2	Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Knowledge.....
3.2.1	<i>Measures of Knowledge.....</i>
3.2.2	<i>Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Knowledge of Registered Nurses.....</i>
3.2.3	<i>Mean Knowledge Scores.....</i>
3.2.4	<i>Differences in Knowledge Scores According to Area of Knowledge Tested.....</i>
3.3	Relationship Between (Total) Knowledge Scores and Other Variables.....
3.3.1	<i>Gender and Age.....</i>
3.3.2	<i>Current Clinical Area.....</i>
3.3.3	<i>Current Clinical Position.....</i>
3.3.4	<i>Work Status.....</i>
3.3.5	<i>Use of the Nursing Procedure Manual.....</i>
3.3.6	<i>Seeking Clinical Advice.....</i>
3.3.7	<i>Educational Behaviour.....</i>
3.3.8	<i>Use of Tobacco and Alcohol.....</i>
	<i>Alcohol Consumption.....</i>
	<i>Tobacco Use.....</i>
3.3.9	<i>Personal Experience.....</i>
3.4	Therapeutic Attitudes.....
3.4.1	<i>The Therapeutic Attitude Scale.....</i>
3.4.2	<i>Attitudinal Responses of Registered Nurses to Patients with ATOD-Related Problems.....</i>
3.4.3	<i>Mean scores of Therapeutic Attitudes.....</i>
	<i>Differences Between Factor Scale Mean Scores.....</i>
3.5	Relationship Between Therapeutic Attitude Scores and Other Variables.....
3.5.1	<i>Gender and Age.....</i>
3.5.2	<i>Current Clinical Area.....</i>

3.5.3	<i>Current Clinical Position</i>
3.5.4	<i>Work Status</i>
3.5.5	<i>Use of the Nursing Procedure Manual</i>
3.5.6	<i>Seeking Clinical Advice</i>
3.5.7	<i>Educational Behaviour</i>
3.5.8	<i>Use of Tobacco and Alcohol</i>
	<i>Alcohol Consumption</i>
	<i>Tobacco Use</i>
3.5.9	<i>Personal Experience</i>
3.6	Therapeutic Attitude Item Not Included in Factor Scale
3.7	Relationships Between Therapeutic Attitude Scores and Knowledge Scores
3.8	Frequency of Key Clinical Behaviours
3.8.1	<i>The Clinical Activity Scale</i>
3.8.2	<i>Clinical Activity Mean Scores</i>
	<i>Differences Between Mean Factor Scale Scores</i>
3.9	Relationship Between Clinical Activity Scores and Other Variables
3.9.1	<i>Gender and Age</i>
3.9.2	<i>Current Clinical Area</i>
3.9.3	<i>Current Clinical Position</i>
3.9.4	<i>Work Status</i>
3.9.5	<i>Use of the Nursing Procedure Manual</i>
3.9.6	<i>Seeking Clinical Advice</i>
3.9.7	<i>Educational Behaviour</i>
3.9.8	<i>Use of Tobacco and Alcohol</i>
3.9.9	<i>Personal Experience</i>
3.10	Relationships Between Clinical Activity Scores, Therapeutic Attitudes, and Knowledge Scores
3.11	Relationships Between Therapeutic Attitudes and the Frequency of Key Clinical Behaviours
3.12	The Assessment and Identification of Patients with ATOD-Related Problems
3.13	Predictors of Key Clinical Behaviours
3.13.1	<i>Regression Model</i>
3.13.2	<i>Regression Analyses</i>
3.13.3	<i>Combined Regression Model</i>
3.14	Summary

**CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS - ALCOHOL,
TOBACCO AND OTHER DRUG-RELATED KNOWLEDGE AND THERAPEUTIC**

ATTITUDES.....

4.1 Introduction.....

4.1.1 *Quantitative Analysis*

4.1.2 *Qualitative Analysis*.....

4.2 Knowledge

4.2.1 *Categories of Knowledge and the Imperative of Salience*

4.2.2 *Analysis of Knowledge Scores According to Thematic Codes*

4.3 ATOD-Related Knowledge: ‘Factors Located Within the Nurse’

4.3.1 *Gender and Age*

4.3.2 *Years of Service and Years in Current Clinical Position*.....

4.3.3 *Personal Experience*.....

4.3.4 *Education*.....

4.3.5 *Personal Alcohol and Tobacco Use*

4.4 ATOD-Related Knowledge: ‘Factors Located in the Workplace’

4.4.1 *Current Clinical Area*.....

4.4.2 *Current Clinical Position and Seniority*.....

4.4.3 *Work Context/Status*.....

4.4.4 *Use of the Nursing Procedure Manual*.....

4.4.5 *Seeking Clinical Advice*.....

4.5 Therapeutic Attitudes.....

4.5.1 *Discussion of Major Findings: Therapeutic Attitudes*

4.5.2 *Role Adequacy*

4.5.3 *Role Legitimacy*

4.5.3.1 *Role Legitimacy and Workplace Encouragement*

4.5.3.2 *Role Legitimacy: Tobacco a Special Case*.....

4.5.4 *Non-Judgement (Moralism)*.....

4.5.4.1 *Non-Judgement and Role Adequacy*.....

4.5.4.2 *Non-Judgement: Addiction as a Matter of Will Power or Moral Fortitude?*

4.5.4.3 *Non-Judgement: “Alcoholics” and “Addicts” Are Worth the Effort*.....

4.5.4.4 *Non-Judgement and Drinking: A Particular Case*

4.5.4.5 *Non-Judgement and the Value of Intervention: Nurses Are Not Sure*

4.6 Discussion of the Relationships Between Therapeutic Attitude Scores and Other Variables.....

4.6.1 *Factors Located Within the Nurse*.....

4.6.1.1 *Personal Experience*

4.6.1.2 *Education*

4.6.1.3 *Personal Alcohol and Tobacco Use*

4.7 Factors Located Within the Workplace

4.7.1 *Current Clinical Area*.....

4.7.2	<i>Current Clinical Position</i>
4.7.3	<i>Work Status</i>
4.7.4	<i>The Use of the Nursing Procedure Manual</i>
4.7.5	<i>Seeking Clinical Advice and Encouragement to Do So</i>
4.8	Summary

CHAPTER FIVE: CLINICAL ACTIVITY - RESPONSES OF REGISTERED NURSES TO ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUG-RELATED PROBLEMS

5.1	Frequency of Key Clinical Behaviours
5.2	Rhetorical Gap
5.3	Differences in the Frequencies of Clinical Activity
5.4	Ideal and Actual Practice
5.5	Assessment Behaviour
5.5.1	<i>Differences in Assessment for Specific Substance Use Compared to the Comprehensive ATOD History</i>
5.5.2	<i>Biomedical Versus Psychosocial Assessment</i>
5.5.3	<i>Assessment Behaviour: Differences between Education and Training, and Actual Practice</i>
5.6	Information-Giving Behaviour
5.6.1	<i>Smoking Cessation: Difference between Ideal and Actual Practice</i>
5.7	Intervention Behaviours
5.7.1	<i>Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug-Related Problems and the Team Approach</i>
5.7.2	<i>A Hierarchy of Intervention Behaviours</i>
5.7.3	<i>The "Rhetorical Gap" and the Difference between Intent and Support</i>
5.8	Relationships Between the Frequency of Clinical Activity and Other Variables
5.8.1	<i>Factors Within the Nurse</i>
5.8.1.1	Gender and Age.....
5.8.1.2	Personal Experience.....
5.8.1.3	Education.....
5.8.1.4	Personal Alcohol and Tobacco Use.....
5.8.2	<i>Factors Located in the Workplace</i>
5.8.2.1	Current Clinical Area.....
5.8.2.2	Current Clinical Area Re-Coded.....
5.8.2.3	Current Clinical Area and Information-Giving Behaviour.....
5.8.2.4	Current Clinical Area: Assessment Behaviour, and Intervention Behaviour.....
5.8.2.5	Current Clinical Position.....
5.8.2.6	Work Status.....
5.8.2.7	The Use of the Nursing Procedure Manual.....
5.8.2.8	Seeking Clinical Advice.....

5.9	Predictors of Key Clinical Behaviours
5.9.1	<i>Univariate Analysis</i>
5.9.2	<i>Multiple Regression Analysis</i>
5.9.2.1	Predictors of Key Clinical Behaviours: “Readiness”
5.9.2.2	Predictors of Key Clinical Behaviours: “Exposure”
5.9.2.3	Predictors of Key Clinical Behaviours: “Clinical Setting”
5.10	A Hierarchy of Predictors of the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Clinical Activity of Registered Nurses
5.10.1	<i>Total Therapeutic Attitude.....</i>
5.10.2	<i>Refers to Nursing Policy Manual (NPM).....</i>
5.10.3	<i>Total Knowledge Score.....</i>
5.10.4	<i>Works in a Rural Postcode Area.....</i>
5.10.5	<i>Reads Nursing Journals Regularly.....</i>
5.10.6	<i>Works in a Primary Health Care Setting.....</i>
5.10.6.1	Clinical Setting: Implications of Where the Nurse Works
5.10.7	<i>Years of Service as a Registered Nurse</i>
5.10.8	<i>Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug-Specific In-Service Education.....</i>
5.11	Summary

CHAPTER SIX: THE NUMBERS ADD UP... BUT:.....

6.1	Convergent and Divergent Findings.....
6.2	Qualitative Themes: Factors Located Within the Nurse
6.2.1	<i>Nurse Lacks Knowledge/Education</i>
6.2.1.1	Have No Knowledge – Does it Matter?
6.2.1.2	Have No Knowledge in Clinical Settings with High Prevalence of ATOD-Related Problems
6.2.1.3	Primary Health Care Nurses do More – Do They Know More?
6.2.1.4	Desired and Useful Knowledge.....
6.2.2	<i>Nurse Lacks Skills.....</i>
6.2.3	<i>Nurse Not Aware of ATOD Issues</i>
6.2.4	<i>Nurse Lacks Experience</i>
6.2.5	<i>Nurse Has Negative Attitudes</i>
6.2.6	<i>Nurse Lacks Confidence.....</i>
6.2.7	<i>Nurse Has no Authority to Act.....</i>
6.2.8	<i>Do Not Know Policies/Referrals/Resources</i>
6.2.9	<i>Nurse Frightened/Fearful</i>
6.2.10	<i>Frustration/Impatient/Hopelessness.....</i>
6.2.11	<i>Nurse Knows Patient.</i>
6.3	Qualitative Themes: Factors Located Within the Patient
6.3.1	<i>Patient Is Uncooperative/Non-Compliant/Does Not Want to Stop.....</i>
6.3.2	<i>Denial/Lack of Acceptance of a Problem</i>
6.3.3	<i>Type of ATOD Problem, Level of Intoxication/Type and Pattern of Drug Use/Withdrawal/Long Term Effects</i>
6.3.4	<i>Inappropriate.....</i>

6.3.5	<i>Disruptiveness/Abusive Behaviour/Aggression</i>
6.3.6	<i>Social Status /Age</i>
6.3.7	<i>Less Deserving or Lower Priority of Care</i>
6.3.8	<i>Recidivism</i>
6.3.9	<i>Apathy/Lack of Insight</i>
6.3.10	<i>Already in Treatment</i>
6.3.11	<i>Untrustworthy</i>
6.4	Summary

**CHAPTER SEVEN: NURSES, THEIR WORKPLACE, WORK MATES,
AND ATOD INTERVENTIONS.....**

7.1	Qualitative Themes: Factors Located Within the Workplace
7.1.1	<i>Little or No Exposure to Patients with ATOD-Related Problems</i>
7.1.2	<i>Need in-Service</i>
7.1.3	<i>Lack of Back Up Support Structures</i>
7.1.4	<i>Lack of Time/Too Busy</i>
7.1.5	<i>Lack Time to Establish Rapport/Contact</i>
7.1.6	<i>Not Relevant/Not my Business</i>
7.1.7	<i>Lack of Clear Policy</i>
7.1.8	<i>Appropriateness of Clinical Environment and Privacy</i>
7.1.9	<i>Understaffed</i>
7.1.10	<i>Inadequate ATOD Nursing Protocols</i>
7.1.11	<i>ATOD Interventions: Role Confusion/Role Boundaries</i>
7.2	Qualitative Themes: Factors Located Within Other Health Care Providers
7.2.1	<i>ATOD-Related Problems, Seen as a Specialist Problem - Refer On</i>
7.2.2	<i>Lack of Cooperation and Support</i>
7.2.3	<i>Lack of Specialist Referral Options</i>
7.2.4	<i>Medical Officers Need Education</i>
7.2.5	<i>Negative Attitudes of Others</i>
7.2.6	<i>Predominance of Medical Model</i>
7.3	Qualitative Themes: Factors Located Within the Social / Cultural Context
7.3.1	<i>Nurses See ATOD Intervention as Intrusive and an Invasion of Privacy</i>
7.3.2	<i>Cultural Acceptance of ATOD Use</i>
7.3.3	<i>Nurses Personal ATOD Use/Exposure to Family and Friends with ATOD-Related Problems</i>
7.3.4	<i>Lack of Support From Family</i>
7.3.5	<i>Stigma for Patient</i>
7.3.6	<i>Disruption of Family</i>

7.4	Qualitative Themes: Comments and Concerns Regarding Nursing Practice.....	
7.4.1	<i>Completing Survey Gave an Awareness of Low Knowledge.....</i>	
7.4.2	<i>Other Responses of Interest</i>	
7.4.3	<i>ATOD-Related Problems and the Need for Prevention.....</i>	
7.5	Summary	

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

Research Question 1	
Research Question 2	
Research Question 3	
Research Question 4	
Research Question 5	
Research Question 6	
Research Question 7	

Reflections and Recommendations	349
---------------------------------------	------------

A Final Conclusion Is.....	353
----------------------------	------------

APPENDICES.....	355
------------------------	------------

Appendix I.....	355
-----------------	------------

REFERENCES	366
-------------------------	------------

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug-Related Knowledge Items	
Table 2: Therapeutic Attitude Scale Items	
Table 3: Clinical Activity Scale Items	
Table 4: Qualitative Responses Ranked by Percentage of Responses Pilot Survey: Orana/Far West, NSW (n = 145).....	
Table 5: Qualitative Analysis – Final Thematic Coding Frame.....	
Table 6: Registered Nurses: Age Groups of Respondents (n=1281) Compared to Total Population of Registered Nurses Working in NSW	
Table 7: Registered Nurses: Year of First Registration (n=1281).....	
Table 8: Registered Nurses (n=1281) Current Clinical Area of Work.....	
Table 9: Registered Nurses: Frequency of Current Position (n=1281)	
Table 10: Use of Nursing Procedure Manual.....	
Table 11: What is Done First When Seeking Advice About the Nursing Management of a Patient With an ATOD-Related Problem.....	
Table 12: Number of Cigarettes Smoked Daily.....	
Table 13: Amount of Alcohol Consumed by Males	
Table 14: Amount of Alcohol Consumed by Females.....	
Table 15: Proportion of Correct Answers by Knowledge Item: Registered Nurses (n=1281)	
Figure 1: Proportion of Correct Answers by Knowledge Area (in Percent)	
Table 16: Relationships between <i>Total Knowledge Score</i> , and <i>Key Variables of Interest</i> (n=1281).....	
Table 17: Agreement with Therapeutic Attitude Items by Percent - Registered Nurses (n=1281).....	
Table 18: Agreement with Therapeutic Attitude Item Not Included in Factor Scale, by Percent (n=1281)	
Table 19: Mean Scores of Total Attitude Scale and Factor Scales (n=1281)	
Table 20: Relationships Between <i>Total Therapeutic Attitude Scores</i> , and <i>Key Variables of Interest</i>	
Table 21: Relationships Between <i>Therapeutic Attitude Factor-Scales</i> and <i>Key Variables of Interest</i>	
Table 21 (contd.): Relationships Between Therapeutic Attitude Factor-Scales and Key Variables of Interest	
Table 22: Frequency of Clinical Activities by Percent - Registered Nurses (n=1281).....	
Table 23: Mean Scores for Clinical Activity Scale and Factor Scales (Frequencies).....	
Table 24: Relationships Between <i>Total Clinical Activity Scores</i> , and <i>Key Variables</i> (n=1281).....	
Table 25: Relationships Between <i>Clinical Activity Factor-Scales</i> and <i>Key Variables</i>	
Table 26: Differences in Mean Scores of <i>Clinical Activity Factor Scales</i> and <i>Therapeutic Attitude Factor Scales</i> (n=1281)	
Table 27: Differences in Mean Scores between Key Therapeutic Attitude items and Key Clinical Activity Items	
Table 28: Comparison of Stated Responsibility to Identify Alcohol and/or Other Drug- Related Problems with Assessment Behaviour Items (Mean Scores).....	
Table 29: Predictors of the Alcohol and Other Drug-Related Clinical Behaviours of Practising Registered Nurses by Order of Strength of Association (n = 1281)	

Figure 2: Mean Scores: Total Therapeutic Attitude and Therapeutic Attitude Factor Scales (n=1281).....	
Figure 3: Comparison of Mean Scores - Total Therapeutic Attitude to Total Clinical Activity (n=1281).....	
Figure 4: Mean Scores: Belief That ATOD History Should be Routine Versus Frequency of History Taking.....	
Figure 5: Clinical Activity Scales: Mean Scores (n=1281).....	
Figure 6: Difference between IDEAL and ACTUAL Practice (n=1281).....	
Figure 7: ATOD Assessment Behaviours I (n=1281).....	
Figure 8: ATOD Assessment Behaviours II (n=1281).....	
Figure 9: Difference Between Training and Actual Practice (n=1281).....	
Figure 10: Information-Giving Behaviours: Mean Scores (n=1281).....	
Figure 11: Difference Between IDEAL and ACTUAL Practice: Smoking Cessation (n=1281).....	
Figure 12: Intervention Behaviours: Mean Scores (n=1281).....	
Figure 13: Difference Between Intent and Support (n=1281).....	
Table 30: Factors Located Within the Nurse – Ranked by Percentage of Responses (n=1281).....	
Table 31: Theme A01 - Lack Knowledge/Education (n=1281).....	
Table 32: Theme A.02 - Nurse Lacks Skills (n=1281).....	
Table 33: Theme A.08 - Nurse Not Aware of ATOD Issues (n=1281).....	
Table 34: Theme A.04 - Nurse Lacks Experience (n=1281).....	
Table 35: Theme A.05 - Nurse has Negative Attitudes (n=1281).....	
Table 36: Theme A.03 - Nurse Lacks Confidence (n=1281).....	
Table 37: Theme A.11 - Nurse has No Authority to Act (n=1281).....	
Table 38: Theme A.10 - Do Not Know Policies/Referrals/Resources (n=1281).....	
Table 39: Theme A.07 - Nurse Frightened/Fearful (n=1281).....	
Table 40: Theme A.09 - Frustration/Impatience/Hopelessness (n=1281).....	
Table 41: Theme A.06 - Nurse Knows Patient (n=1281).....	
Table 42: Mean Scores of Total Therapeutic Attitude Scale and Factor Scales (n=1281).....	
Table 43: Factors Located Within the Patient – Ranked by Percentage of Responses (n=1281).....	
Table 44: Non-Judgement Scale Items.....	
Table 45: Theme B.01 - Patient Uncooperative/Non Compliant/Doesn't Want to Stop (n=1281).....	
Table 46: Theme B.06 - Denial/Lack of Acceptance of Problem (n=1281).....	
Table 47: Theme B.07 - Type of ATOD Problem, Intoxication/Type of Drug Use/Withdrawal/Long Term Effects (n=1281).....	
Table 48: Theme B.11 - Inappropriate (n=1281).....	
Table 49: Theme B.03 - Disruptiveness/Abusive Behaviour/Aggression (n=1281).....	
Table 50: Theme B.10 - Social Status/Age (n=1281).....	
Table 51: Theme B.04 - Less Deserving or Lower Priority of Care (n=1281).....	
Table 52: Theme B.02 - Recidivism (n=1281).....	
Table 53: Theme B.08 - Apathy/Lack of Insight (n=1281).....	
Table 54: Theme B.08 - Already in Treatment (n=1281).....	
Table 55: Theme B.05 - Untrustworthy (n=1281).....	
Table 56: Factors Located Within the Workplace – Ranked by Percentage of Responses (n=1281).....	
Table 57: Theme C.10 - Little or No Exposure to These Patients (n=1281).....	

Table 58: Theme C.09 - Need In-Service (n=1281)
Table 59: Theme C.05 - Lack of Back Up Support Structures (n=1281)
Table 60: Theme C.01 - Lack of Time/Too Busy (n=1281).....
Table 61: Theme C.01A - Lack Time to Establish Rapport/Contact (n=1281)
Table 62: Theme C0.8 - Not Relevant/Not my Business (n=1281)
Table 63: Theme C.04 - Lack of Clear Policy (n=1281)
Table 64: Theme C.03 - Environment –Privacy - Appropriateness (n=1281)
Table 65: Theme -C.02 - Understaffed (n=1281)
Table 66: Theme C.07 - Inadequate ATOD Nursing Protocols (n=1281)
Table 67: Theme C.06 - Role Confusion/ Role Boundaries (n=1281).....
Table 68: Factors Located Within other Health Care Providers – Ranked by Percentage of Responses (n=1281)
Table 69: Theme D.05 - Seen As a Specialist Problem - Refer on (n=1281)
Table 70: Theme D.03 - Lack of Cooperation and Support (n=1281) :
Table 71: Theme D.06 - Lack of Specialist Referral Options (n=1281).....
Table 72: Theme D.01 - Medical Officers need Education (n=1281).....
Table 73: Theme D.02 - Negative Attitudes of Others (n=1281).....
Table 74: Theme D.04 - Predominance of Medical Model (n=1281).....
Table 75: Factors Located Within the Social/Cultural Context – Ranked by Percentage of Responses (n=1281)
Table 76: Theme E.02 - Nurses See ATOD Intervention as Intrusive/Invasion of Privacy (n=1281).....
Table 77: Theme E.03 - Cultural Acceptance of ATOD Use (n=1281).....
Table 78: Theme E.04 - Nurses Personal ATOD Use/Exposure to ATOD Problems (n=1281).....
Table 79: Theme E.05 - Lack of Support From Family (n=1281)
Table 80: Theme E.01 - Stigma for Patient (n=1281)
Table 81: Theme E.06 - Disruption of Family (n=1281).....
Table 82: Comments and Concerns Regarding Nursing Practice – Ranked by Percentage of Responses (n=1281)
Table 83: Theme F.04 - Survey Leads to The Realization of the Need/Want to Know More (n=1281).....
Table 84: Theme G.01 - Other Responses of Interest-Not Coded (n=1281)
Table 85: Theme F0.1 - Need for Prevention (n=1281)

ABSTRACT

There is an enduring and prevailing disparity between the clinical prevalence of alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related problems and the frequency that nurses recognise and intervene in these common problems. The extant nursing literature has long determined an urgent need for further investigation into why nurses do not respond to patients with ATOD-related problems in the consistent and effective manner that the prevalence of these costly health problems require, or in a manner that reflects the opportunities that nurses have to offer brief and timely intervention.

This thesis reports and discusses the investigation of factors that determine identification, assessment and interventions of patients with alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related problems by a randomly selected sample of Registered Nurses [n=1281] in practice in New South Wales, Australia. Of particular interest was the relationship between nurses' ATOD knowledge, therapeutic attitudes and clinical activity.

Multiple quantitative and qualitative methods were used, firstly to systematically investigate factors within the nurse and their clinical setting that might predict desired clinical behaviour towards addressing ATOD-related problems, and secondly, to analyse and describe nurses' self-reported perceptions, views and experiences of the issue and what aids or impedes it.

The research instrument - a 72 item self-completed questionnaire was developed and refined within a process of three (3) pilot studies and test-retest method.

A multiple regression model was developed to establish the predictors of key clinical behaviours. Thematic coding was used to analyse the perceptions of these nurses as to the factors that affect their ability to intervene with patients who have ATOD-related problems. Convergent and divergent concerns between quantitative and qualitative findings became apparent.

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses demonstrated that nurses report a complex of factors that affect their ability and capacity to intervene with patients who have ATOD-related problems. Among these are factors located within nurses themselves, within their patient(s), within their workplace, within other health professionals and within the broader social/cultural context.

The latter part of the thesis systematically considers the relationships between the quantitative and qualitative findings within this large sample of registered nurses. From this comprehensive level of analysis, workforce implications for ATOD education, training and organisational support for nurses, the most numerous group of health care workers, have been readily identified.

The major empirical finding of this investigation is that there is a significant difference between positive attitudinal sets and motivation of practicing registered nurses to perform desired ATOD-related clinical activities, and the lower reported frequency at which this occurs. The qualitative findings are highly convergent with the empirical ones. It is the nurse's self-identified lack of knowledge, skills, experience and confidence that is now reported as having the greatest effect on their ability to assess, identify and offer brief and timely intervention for patients with ATOD-related problems, rather than any prevailing beliefs and attitudes that these patients were not worthy of their care, or outside the legitimate framework of their nursing role.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university: and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

William Goodin

Date

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Myrna, and my son Angus both of whom left before I could finish.

I treasure every moment they walked beside me and praise God that now they sing with joy in the presence of the Lord.