

Registered nurses (RNs) play a pivotal role in rural communities, in the care of patients dying at home. However, the lived experiences of these RNs are poorly reported in research studies to date. In this study, a phenomenological study guided by a Gadamerian approach was adopted to explore the experiences of 16 RNs, including two Nurse Practitioners. All were employed by government funded community-based health care services in one state of Australia. The analysis of data followed an extended version of Diekelmann, Allen & Tanner's (1989) seven-stage process.

Data revealed the lived experience of these RNs to be more than the work they undertook; it was an ongoing process of finding balance between their professional and personal selves. Complex, intertwined relationships between the community, patients' families and themselves determined how the RNs went about their professional work and personal lives.

These lived experiences occurred within three environments (or settings): the community, the health care service and the home. The home emerged as the dominant environment. In this environment, the RNs found they were invited guests within their professional roles as they worked in the private space of another family. Furthermore, the work in patients' homes in rural communities evoked unique experiences; experiences that would not have occurred in other care settings.

Suggested strategies include the implementation and strengthening of innovative models of service provision to support RNs in rural communities in Australia, to improve the standard of home-based palliative care.