Week 3: Concept Analysis

Foundations of Nursing Theory



The same thing happens within nursing. Basic concepts, such as caring, pain, and therapeutic communication, provide the foundation for any nursing theory. Once the foundation is laid, consideration is given to the linkages among the various components of the theory. These linkages, or relational statements, provide meaning and structure to the theory. The relational statements describe and explain the function of each component of the theory (Asselin, 2011; Parker & Smith, 2015).

As illustrated, concepts are foundational to any nursing theory (Parker & Smith, 2010). They also are key ingredients within the research process. When the primary investigator (PI) decides on the specific concepts to be studied, these concepts require both a theoretical and operational definition. Providing both definitions enables the PI to describe the concept usage within the study and exactly how it will be measured or operationalized. The question is: Are all concepts universal?

In the opening scenario, we discovered that concepts can and do have multiple meanings for the same group of people. Within nursing, a concept analysis has become an accepted mechanism to assist in defining and operationalizing concepts that are considered to be known by all but are actually not clearly known (Parker & Smith, 2015).

Consider what has happened in the past 40 years with regard to a patient's right to die. In the mid-1970s, Karen Quinlan lapsed into a coma after a party, after which she needed artificial ventilation. In her vegetative state, she continued to need ventilatory assistance, and her parents eventually requested the removal of the ventilator. It was a nurse who questioned this, and the parents received a court order allowing the removal of the ventilator. Quinlan lived for an additional 9 years. Subsequently, this incident sparked much legal and ethical debate, so that by the mid-1990s, the American public assumed a right to all extraordinary measures, and the medical community needed a definition of a concept called medical futility.

Though medical futility began to enter the literature in the mid-1990s, there was no clear definition or measure for this concept. Nurses (and other healthcare providers) could clearly explain the futility of continuing to use unsuccessful treatments, such as antibiotics or pain medication, but to remove such things as artificial ventilation was a level of care many were unable to clearly delineate. Eventually, a concept analysis was published that clearly defined medical futility, along with contributing factors and empirical indicators. The concept analysis clearly defined antecedents (what comes before) and the consequences of the concept (Parker & Smith, 2015; Walker & Avant, 2011). For medical futility, some of the antecedents were catastrophic events leading to irreversible total body failure, including such things as the absence of any voluntary responses, including breathing. The consequence of medical futility is death, but it is the physiological process, not an active intervention on the part of any healthcare provider, that leads to that consequence.

**Reflection**

Now consider the current knowledge and technology explosion that has created formation of new concepts such as meaningful use, usability, virtual learning environment, and resilience (nurse and/or patient). What are other new concepts in nursing?

## Concept Analysis



A concept analysis is a structured process of examining a complex concept in order to determine a mutual understanding within an applied context. Concept analysis is used to make sense of concepts foundational to theory development. There are several different methods for conducting a concept analysis; however most methods share common process steps.