Patients who attempted suicide emphasised they wanted to be well cared for and receive understanding and confirmation


QUESTION: What are the experiences of patients during inpatient psychiatric care after a suicide attempt?

Design
Qualitative description using content analysis of interview data.

Setting
Specialised ward in the psychiatric clinic of the Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden.

Patients
18 Swedish speaking patients (age range 18–53 y, 67% men) who had recently attempted suicide.

Methods
The patients were interviewed as close to hospital discharge as possible. They were asked to describe their experiences of the care they received. Researchers used an interview guide to enquire about admission to hospital, feelings and reactions, and positive and negative experiences during the hospital stay. The interviews that lasted between 30 and 70 minutes were transcribed verbatim. A qualitative content analysis of the meanings, intentions, consequences and the context of data was done.

Main findings
3 central categories were identified: (1) being a psychiatric patient, (2) perceptions of the caregivers and the care provided, and (3) important aspects of the psychiatric care received. The patients described mixed feelings about being a psychiatric patient. They commonly reported feelings of discomfort, nervousness, failure, and shame as well as feelings of relief at being admitted to hospital because they could not cope any longer. Although the patients had difficulties accepting admission to hospital in a psychiatric clinic, they understood the need for it. Patients expressed shock and horror over having tried to kill themselves.

The patients described their perceptions of the caregivers and care provided in positive and negative ways. Many patients felt that the staff really cared and showed understanding, confirmation, trust, and respect were emphasised. Lack of confirmation sometimes contributed to patients’ feelings of being burdensome, demands for discharge, or even another suicide attempt.

Important aspects of the psychiatric care received included the opportunity to talk to staff members and be understood, the invitation by staff to access the ward after discharge if necessary, and the admission to hospital itself, which patients viewed as life saving.

Conclusion
Patients who had attempted suicide and were inpatients on a psychiatric ward emphasised that they wanted to be well cared for and receive understanding and confirmation.

COMMENTS
This study emphasises the need for further hypothesis generating research to explore the particular characteristics of patients and settings that determine satisfaction with care and caregivers.

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