


# Peplau's Theory of Interpersonal Relations: Application in Emergency and Rural Nursing

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## Abstract

The author in this column highlights aspects of Peplau's theory of interpersonal relations and its use both in emergency nursing and rural nursing. Long and Weinert identified the concepts of rural nursing. Some differences between Peplau's theory and rural nursing can be identified through definitions of theory and conceptual models. Despite these differences, there are some common themes between both theories that are described and compared.

## Keywords

emergency nursing, nurse-patient relationship, nursing theory, rural nursing, Peplau

Nurse scholars agree that nurses utilize some form of nursing theory, or conceptual model in daily practice and they propose that nursing theory is vital to nursing existence. Meleis (1985) defined theory as "an articulated and communicated conceptualization of invented or discovered reality (central phenomenon and relationships) in or pertaining to nursing for the purpose of describing, explaining, predicting or prescribing nursing care" (p. 29). Through theory analysis, nurses gain power through knowledge and understanding of the phenomena that characterize the nursing situation (Melnyk, 1989).

Fawcett (2010) stated that conceptual models of nursing and nursing theories are a starting point for nursing practice instead of other points of view, such as the medical model. She believed nurses need to adopt the conceptual-theoretic-empirical system to acquire knowledge in nursing to guide nursing practice.

In terms of advocating evidenced-based nursing practice, it is essential that nursing theories are developed, tested, and disseminated for practical use. Polit and Beck (2012) described conceptual models as ideas assembled in terms of their relevance to a common theme. Conceptual models are more broad and abstract than theories. Fawcett (2010) delineated nursing theory and nursing conceptual model in the different contexts for which each is used.

One example of a nursing theory is the middle-range theory. Middle-range theories focus on a portion of reality or human experience, involving a selected number of concepts. Mariner-Tomey and Alligood (2006) added that nursing theory provides autonomy by reinforcing nursing practice, education and research. Nursing research findings from rigorous studies provide a robust basis for nursing decisions and actions and help guide nursing

Quantitative as well as qualitative research is the foundation of evidence-based nursing practice. Qualitative research cannot be disregarded since this research includes human experiences such as love, happiness, hope, and despair. It seems logical to utilize middle-range theories for testing nursing theory in order to differentiate nurse's contributions to the health and well-being of human beings from contributions by other disciplines. Conceptual models may lead to middle-range theory development, which can generate empirical research findings to validate nursing actions and practice. Nursing theory leads to the further development of nursing knowledge through its research potential. Most theories described in the literature relate to the metaparadigm of nursing (Fawcett, 2010).

In practice, thoughtful, effective, communication, and interpersonal skills can produce positive health outcomes whether it is in an emergency department or a public health setting. According to Fawcett (2010), nurses assess and intervene in the context of the metaparadigm to produce the desired outcome. The nurse-patient relationship fosters trust and understanding between nurse and patient. Through this relationship, goals for the patient are set and can be achieved.

## Peplau's Theory of Interpersonal Relations

Peplau (1952) developed the theory of interpersonal relations. She was a staff nurse, researcher, and educator. Peplau urged nurses to use nursing situations as a source of

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