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'Renegotiated identities': stories of women who are initiated traditional healers and work in a hospital environment in a different capacity

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the experiences of traditional healers who work in a hospital environment in a different capacity. A secondary aim of this inquiry is to look at how participants' perceptions of the interface between traditional and modern medicine in a hospital context influences their practices as both traditional healers and hospital employees. A snowball sampling strategy was employed and five suitable participants were identified through referral and post-interview selection. Participants were selected from a sample of South African-born women who have experienced an ancestral calling and initiation into African traditional healing, have been initiated as an *Inyanga/iSangoma* (diviner), and are presently working in a different vocational capacity in a hospital environment. All participants work and reside in Gauteng. Data was collected through two semi-structured interviews per participant. Interviews were based on an interview guide.

In looking at participants' experience as traditional healers who work in a hospital and how their perceptions on the interface between traditional and modern medicine influence their traditional healing practices, four research questions have been identified: 1. How do participants perceive themselves as a traditional healer? 2. How do participants perceive and experience their work in the hospital? 3. How do participants perceive the interface between traditional and modern approaches to healing in a hospital context? 4. How do participants experience the perceptions of others at work? A qualitative approach was adopted in order to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Data analysis was guided by narrative and thematic approaches. Thus results are presented in accordance with principles of narrative and thematic content analysis. Interpretation of data focused on the ways in which these women relate to their role as traditional healer in a different vocational capacity and how their perceptions reflect a broader dialogue on the relationship between traditional and modern healing modalities in a modern health care context. Participants felt empowered by some colleagues who consulted them on traditional healing skills and applied them to patients without constraint upon their working duties. All felt they needed their jobs to support a decent living as full-time work as traditional healers would not provide for all their needs. Implications for future research and collaboration between western and traditional healing systems are considered.