Master’s thesis: “The caring culture as the home of the next of kin” – a hermeneutical study on a caring culture that embraces the next of kin.

Keywords: next of kin, suffering, elderly care, caring science, caring, caring communion, hermeneutics

The aim of this caring science study is to seek a deeper understanding and knowledge of a caring culture that embraces the next of kin. The study uses a hermeneutic approach to answer the following main question: What characterizes a caring culture that embraces the next of kin? Other questions are: What does a caring communion mean to the next of kin? What is health and what is suffering to the next of kin?

The theoretical perspective of the study has its origin in the Caring Science tradition, developed at Åbo Akademi University. The following truths about caring, or axioms, constitute the theoretical perspective of the study: Communion is the basis for all humanity. Human beings are fundamentally interrelated to an abstract and/or concrete other in communion. Caring is human by nature, that is, a calling to serve in love. Suffering is an inseparable part of life. Suffering and health are each other’s prerequisites.

Eighteen stories by next of kin and a literary work that describes the experiences of a next of kin are interpreted by the use of Ödman’s interpretation model for existential hermeneutics. The first phase of interpretation consists of a reconstruction of facts and living conditions from the stories. In the second phase, facts are being structured and a pattern created. The new understanding of the next of kin’s world takes shape and place through a dialogue between the interpretation of the literary work and the stories.

The result of the study, “The caring culture as the home of the next of kin”, is presented in three theses: 1. The understanding and confirmation of the patient’s and the next of kin’s life stories constitute the basis for caring and for a caring culture that embraces the next of kin and caring as something natural. 2. The meaning of the caring communion to the next of kin arises from a feeling of doing what is good for the patient together with the nursing staff, and by acknowledging caring as something natural. 3. The caring culture acknowledges the suffering that the next of kin is confronted with in meeting with ageing and death. This is a meeting which leaves traces in the next of kin’s life stories.

The study’s contribution to caring science may be found in the realization that the next of kin’s and patients’ life stories are waiting for a listener; the caregiver. The next of kin’s suffering may be a suffering of life that is related to the poor condition of the patient, or to thoughts about growing old. The next of kin may suffer with the patients in their suffering,
which is related to illness or to the care that they are/or are not receiving. The next of kin desire and ask to find a home in the caring culture, where they may exist, flourish and be cherished, and to find a place where the suffering is being acknowledged.