The overall purpose of this thesis is, from the perspective of nursing science and philosophy and through a hermeneutical approach, to deepen the understanding of the human being during perioperative care and to build a model. The patients in this research are persons, who after perioperative care or a surgical operation should obtain alleviation for their suffering. To reach this purpose, answers were sought to the following questions: 1) How did patients experience themselves during the perioperative care? 2) What kind of human being is there behind the patient in perioperative care? To build a new theoretical model for perioperative care, further steps were necessary by seeking answers to the questions 1) What does it mean to be a human being as a patient during perioperative care? and 2) How can the understanding of the human being be deepened and interpreted through a philosophical perspective?

Following contact with the management of the central hospital, permission was gained to collect data for the research. The empirical study involves interview discussions with 26 Finnish-speaking patients (13 women and 13 men) aged 20–68 years. The research can be seen to consist of three parts, according to the patients' type of operation (major operations, operations with an uncertain outcome and day surgical operations). The interviews, whose length varied between 20 minutes and 2 hours, were conducted and recorded in the years 1994–2001. The theme areas were falling ill, admission to hospital, stay in hospital for the operation, recovery in hospital and at home and the patient's thoughts concerning future. The informants' experiences were explored throughout the various stages perioperative care in its different phases.

The interview data were analysed with content analysis and described with a phenomenological approach. The results were raised to the theoretical level through hermeneutical abstraction according to Gadamer. The new model can be symbolized by figure of two rings tied together. At the centre of all care is the human being therefore she is in the upper ring. The patient is in the same ring inside the human being. Both are main object in care. In the figure is at the bottom another ring; in centre is caritative care as nursing scientific ground. Around the lower ring are individuality, knowledge and life situation, according to results and literature. Life situation of a human being has grounded in philosophy.

The model presented encourages us to search for new solutions, to be utilized in perioperative care and in nursing reality. The results are also applicable to practical challenges in education and in care administration. The future nursing scientific challenges are to further research the meaning of suffering theoretically and in perioperative care, focusing on the human being at the centre. The patients' preoperative thoughts and expectations and our success in their fulfilment should be studied in greater detail. It is important to learn about the patient's suffering during all perioperative care and so find possibilities to alleviate it by the best possible interventions. The number of studies on preoperative and intraoperative phases is limited, which makes it worthwhile to develop my model to theoretical level through deepened research. All these steps help us to describe the human being during perioperative care while the ideas can also be applied to care in general.