## Acknowledgements:

Without the unwavering support, encouragement and enduring patience of all the following people, this thesis would not have been completed. To all of you, I owe a huge debt of gratitude.

My academic supervisory team is formidable and I have been privileged by their expertise and guidance. Thanks are due to Jane Seymour, who supervised and inspired me during the first two years of the doctoral programme. Kate Gerrish stepped into the breach following Jane's departure, before moving on to pastures new herself but not before she had tutored me through the tortuous process of research ethics approval. Lorraine Ellis has been my stalwart since that time, together with my other amazing supervisors Sharron Hinchliff and Michelle Marshall. Thanks also to the invaluable guidance of my project advisory group.

To the nurses on the stroke unit where this study took place, I cannot begin to thank you all for your generosity. You tolerated my intrusion for such a long time and like the patients and relatives in your care, you made me feel cared for too. You are such a credit to our profession and your commitment and achievements deserve far more recognition than I can give them here. Thanks are also due to all the therapy staff but in particular the speech and language therapist, for her guidance in developing communication strategies for the patients in the study with dysphasia.

To the patients and relatives who also participated in the study, I thank you for permitting me to share in such a personal experience and for teaching me so much about the human spirit.

Finally, to my lovely parents, Sheila and John Bennett, just for being who you are, to my brother Lloyd, for his unstoppable humour and for Robert, my long-suffering partner who has been neglected for far too long.

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## Abstract:

Stroke is the third most common cause of death in the United Kingdom and the single greatest cause of severe disability. The effects of stroke are complex but the impact on emotional wellbeing is arguably one of the most problematic aspects of stroke rehabilitation to address. Nurses play a key role in stroke rehabilitation and the ways in which they interact with and respond to the emotional experience of stroke, may be crucial to the well-being of the patient and their relatives.

Informed by an interactionist theory of emotion, the aims of this interpretive ethnographic study were to explore the emotional experiences of persons affected by a stroke (patients and relatives), nurses' interpretations of these experiences and how they used them to inform and influence person-to-person interactions during the period of hospital-based rehabilitation. Taking a case study approach, a purposive sample of 10 cases was selected, with each 'case' comprising a patient, their closest relative and the nurses who provide their care. Data were constructed through participant observation, interviews and documentary review.

Data analysis revealed that through a complex interplay of core beliefs, personal and professional attributes and interpersonal skills, nurses enabled patients and relatives to access and utilise their own personal attributes in order to recover from stroke. An emergent relationship model explains how the relationships built and sustained between nurses, patients and relatives during their encounters with each other on a stroke rehabilitation unit are central to creating a positive culture of caring which promotes emotional wellbeing and aids recovery. The findings have implications for policy, clinical practice, health care education and research.