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The purpose of this study was to describe the meaning of hypertension and the self-care process from the perspective of the essential hypertensive patients, living in Bangkok province. A grounded theory study was conducted with 29 patients with essential hypertension. The participants were selected from the out patient clinics of Ramathibodi Hospital. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interview, observation, tape recording, and examining hospital patient records.

The results showed that the meaning of hypertension has 4 characteristics; 1) internal body sensation in "blood" and "nervse" 2) hypertension and stroke 3) hypertension: from curable to incurable and 4) hypertension has causes. These meanings affect self-care management. Hypertensive self-care management emerged from the data as the core category of self-care process. Hypertensive self-care management was comprised of four stages which corresponded with patient perceptions of the phases of illness. They were 1) compliance with regimen when the patients received diagnosis 2) modifying the regimen by themselves when they perceived the hypertension was cured 3) good self-discipline with self-care requirement when they perceived life-threatening illness. and 4) meeting self-care requirement with flexibility when they perceived that they lived with hypertension. The self-care management process was transformed from lower to higher stages with the patients' accumulation of knowledge, experience and self-care abilities.

The study suggested the necessity for nurses to understand perceptions of meaning and the self-care management process of hypertensive patients in order to facilitate patients' rapid transformation from lower to higher stages.