

Humanizing care in the ICU

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Abstract

Only a patient knows, exactly, what it feels like to be admitted to an intensive care unit, from the moment they enter until they leave, and the experience can be different for every patient. Most patients have terrifying memories of their ICU admissions, as the units are full of equipment, alarms, sounds, voices, and strange smells, which can become stressful factors and often the cause of agitation, as they do not have control or understanding about what is happening.

The ICUs are clinical environments that carry the responsibility of supporting life by correcting or temporarily substitute a failing organ or multiple organs, so most of the time, patients are sedated. Because they are so unwell the priority is to care for the patient's body, to help them fight for survival, and during that process, they end up experiencing loss of personal identity, privacy, dignity, respect, control, and the ability to communicate and advocate for themselves.

Call a patient by their name, present yourself and what is your role, explain procedures, hold their hand, write a patient's diary, allow family to visit, light up sedation, create different strategies to engage in communication, care for patient hair, nails, and hygiene, get to know their history, likes and dislikes and personalize the patient room with photos, smells, blankets are some of the strategies to respect patient humanity. Humanizing care allows the patient to be recognized and cared as a person again.