

# Psychological support for families of patients in intensive care: The vital role of critical care nurses.

Angela Halain\*

Department of Nursing Science, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

## Introduction

Intensive Care Units (ICUs) can be daunting environments, not only for patients battling critical illnesses but also for their families who often experience significant emotional distress and uncertainty. In such circumstances, critical care nurses serve as invaluable sources of support, providing not only medical care but also psychological support to families navigating the complexities of having a loved one in the ICU. In this article, we explore the crucial role that critical care nurses play in offering psychological support to families of ICU patients, examining their interventions, challenges, and the profound impact of their compassionate care [1].

## Understanding the psychological impact on families

Having a loved one in the ICU can be an emotionally overwhelming experience for families. They may experience feelings of anxiety, fear, guilt, grief, and helplessness as they navigate the uncertainty surrounding their loved one's condition and prognosis. The ICU environment, with its beeping monitors, medical equipment, and constant activity, can further exacerbate their stress and sense of disorientation. Critical care nurses recognize the profound psychological impact of critical illness on families and are uniquely positioned to provide support and comfort during this challenging time [2].

## Building therapeutic relationships

One of the fundamental aspects of psychological support provided by critical care nurses is the establishment of therapeutic relationships with families. Nurses take the time to listen attentively to families' concerns, validate their emotions, and provide empathetic support. By fostering open communication and trust, nurses create a safe space where families feel empowered to express their feelings, ask questions, and actively participate in their loved one's care. This sense of partnership and collaboration can alleviate feelings of isolation and helplessness, promoting a sense of agency and resilience among families [3, 4].

## Providing information and education

Critical care nurses play a pivotal role in providing families with clear and accurate information about their loved one's condition, treatment plan, and prognosis. They explain complex medical concepts in understandable language, answer questions, and address any misconceptions or

anxieties that families may have. Education is empowering, enabling families to make informed decisions, advocate for their loved one's needs, and participate meaningfully in care planning and decision-making processes. By demystifying the ICU environment and empowering families with knowledge, nurses help alleviate anxiety and promote a sense of control and empowerment [5].

## Emotional support and coping strategies

In addition to providing information, critical care nurses offer emotional support and coping strategies to help families navigate the emotional rollercoaster of having a loved one in the ICU. They provide reassurance, empathy, and a listening ear, acknowledging the validity of families' emotions and validating their experiences. Nurses may offer practical coping strategies, such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness techniques, or referrals to support services, to help families manage stress and maintain emotional well-being. By acknowledging and addressing families' emotional needs, nurses help foster resilience and facilitate coping mechanisms that can endure beyond the ICU experience [6, 7].

## Facilitating family presence and participation

Critical care nurses recognize the importance of family presence and participation in the care of ICU patients. They advocate for visitation policies that prioritize family-centered care, recognizing families as essential members of the healthcare team. Nurses facilitate meaningful interactions between patients and their loved ones, arranging visits, providing privacy, and offering guidance on how families can contribute to their loved one's care, such as participating in bedside rounds or assisting with personal care tasks. By fostering a supportive environment that values family presence and participation, nurses promote healing and enhance the overall ICU experience for both patients and families [8].

## Addressing ethical and end-of-life issues

Critical care nurses are often involved in supporting families through difficult ethical and end-of-life decisions. They provide guidance, facilitate discussions, and advocate for patients' wishes, ensuring that families have the information and support they need to make informed decisions aligned with their loved one's values and preferences. Nurses approach these sensitive conversations with empathy, compassion, and cultural sensitivity, honoring families' diverse beliefs and

---

\*Correspondence to: Angela Halain, Department of Nursing Science, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Email: halainan@uon.edu.au

Received: 29-Nov-2023, Manuscript No. AAICCN-24-127303; Editor assigned: 01-Dec-2023, PreQC No. AAICCN-24-127303 (PQ); Reviewed: 15-Dec-2023, QC No. AAICCN-24-127303; Revised: 18-Dec-2023, Manuscript No. AAICCN-24-127303 (R); Published: 26-Dec-2023, DOI:10.35841/aaiccn-6.6.178

perspectives. By navigating complex ethical dilemmas with sensitivity and respect, nurses help families find comfort and closure during challenging times [9, 10].

## Conclusion

In conclusion, critical care nurses play a vital role in providing psychological support to families of patients in intensive care. Through their compassionate presence, therapeutic communication, and holistic approach to care, nurses help alleviate anxiety, foster resilience, and promote coping mechanisms among families facing the stress and uncertainty of critical illness. By acknowledging and addressing families' emotional needs, nurses contribute to the overall well-being and satisfaction of both patients and families in the ICU. Their unwavering commitment to compassionate care underscores the invaluable role of nursing in promoting holistic healing and humanizing the ICU experience for all involved.

## References

1. Twenge JM, Campbell SM, Hoffman BJ, Lance CE. Generational differences in work values: Leisure and extrinsic values increasing, social and intrinsic values decreasing. *J Manag.* 2010; 36:1117–42.
2. Cueva M, Kuhnley R, Lanier A, Dignan M. Story: the heartbeat of learning. *Convergence.* 2007; 39: 81–8.
3. Lambert J. Digital storytelling capturing lives, creating community. 2009; Berkeley, CA: Digital Diner Press 1.
4. Shor I. Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change. University of Chicago Press; 2012.
5. Gubrium G. Digital storytelling: an emergent method for health promotion research and practice. *Health Promot Pract.* 2009; 10: 186–91.
6. Brieger, WR (1978). Developing service-based teaching in health education for medical students. *Health Educ Monogr*, 6(4), 345–358.
7. Broussard BB(2011). The bucket list: A service-learning approach to community engagement to enhance community nursing clinical learning. *J Nurs Educ*, 50(1), 40–43.
8. Cangelosi PR. (2004). The tact of teaching RN-to-BSN students. *J Prof Nurs*, 20(3), 167–173.
9. Eyler J, Giles Jr DE. Where's the Learning in Service-Learning? Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104; 1999.
10. Garrison DR, & Vaughan ND. (2008). Blended learning in higher education: Framework, principles, and guidelines. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.