

**Title:** Primary Palliative Care Communication Skills for Practicing Registered Nurses in the Neonatal Intensive Care Setting

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**Statement of the Problem:** Neonatal Intensive Care Registered Nurses (NIC-RNs) lack formal education in palliative care and communication skills when addressing the complex needs of parents of seriously ill or dying infants. Orientation and in-service education for NIC-RNs focus on learning technical skills with little emphasis on building communication skills.

**Literature review:** An extensive evidence review using PubMed, CINAHL, and OVID from 2013-2020 revealed a lack of palliative care education and communication for NIC-RNs caring for critically ill newborns.

**Purpose:** This educational project's purpose is to improve NIC-RNs' palliative care knowledge and attitudes and increase confidence having palliative care conversations and communicating with parents of critically ill infants with uncertain outcomes.

**Methods/Measures:** In Fall 2021, RNs practicing in an 82-bed Level 4 NIC unit at a children's hospital were invited to participate in a 70-minute didactic/interactive educational session utilizing lecture, discussion, and reader's theater. A 24-item survey was developed to evaluate NIC-RN comfort and confidence pre and post education session. Palliative care principles were presented in lecture format and communication skills were illustrated using a case-based narrative and role play. Focus was on parents' expressions of confusion regarding diagnosis/prognosis, conflict regarding treatment options, extreme anger, and profound grief. The responses of the nurse centered on offering support, education on diagnosis/prognosis, clarification of treatment options, acknowledging grief, redirecting, and reframing strong emotions.

**Findings:** Of 24 NIC-RNs who attended the educational session, 18 (75%) participants completed the pre-session survey; 15 (62.5%) completed the post-session survey. Post-survey results indicate an increase in confidence and comfort in palliative care communication skills. Questions pertaining to knowledge of palliative cares demonstrate a mixed result.

**Conclusions/Implications for Practice:** Although the number of participants in the study was small, results support the use of interactive education sessions to increase NIC-RN comfort and confidence in palliative care communication skills.