



Primary Palliative Care Communication Skills for Neonatal ICU Registered Nurses



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Statement of the Problem

Neonatal ICU Registered Nurses (NIC-RNs) lack formal palliative care (PC) education and communication skills

Orientation and in-service education for NIC-RNs emphasize technical skills

Methods

Format: 70-minute didactic/interactive session with lecture, clinical case script utilizing reader's theater, and discussion
Setting: 82-bed Level 4 children's hospital NIC unit
Evaluation: Online link to a 24-item pre/post education survey measuring NIC-RN comfort, confidence, and barriers using a Likert scale on Microsoft Forms
Data Analysis: Frequencies, descriptive stats, t-tests ($p < .05$)
Timeline: June 2021 – October 2021

Implications

- An interactive educational session may increase familiarity of PC definition and confidence/comfort levels when communicating with parents of seriously ill infants.
- Primary PC communication skills education during NIC-RN orientation may benefit NIC-RNs and parents of seriously ill NIC infants.
- Increasing awareness of hospital PC team may increase comfort level accessing and utilizing PC team.

Background

- The National Association of Neonatal Nurses recommends NICU RNs be trained in providing palliative and end-of-life care (Catlin, Brandon, Wool, & Mendes, 2015).
- Having difficult conversations with parents of critically ill infants can prove anxiety-provoking when RNs have little experience caring for NICU patients (Price et al., 2019) and can lead to moral distress (Mills & Cortezzo, 2020).
- Research reveals a serious lack of PC education and communication skills for NIC-RNs when addressing parents of seriously ill or dying infants.

Findings

Sample: 24 Bachelor's prepared NIC-RNs attended the sessions. 18 (75%) pre-survey; 15 (62.5%) post-survey.

NIC-RN Experience: Mean = 1.08 years (Range: 0-19)

Familiarity 0=not familiar, 1=somewhat familiar, 2=familiar, 3=very familiar	Pre-Education Mean (N=18)	Post-Education Mean (N=15)	P-value
How familiar are you with the definition of PC?	2.22	2.73	.04
Confidence or Comfort 0=strongly agree, 1=disagree, 2=agree, 3=strongly agree			
Caring for palliative care patients and their families	2.06	2.40	.04
Communicating with parents re: life and death decisions about their child's diagnosis	1.50	2.13	.02
Accessing the hospital's palliative care team	1.89	2.40	.02
Communicating with parents' expressions of sadness and anger about their child's diagnosis	1.89	2.4	.01
My communication skills when assessing and addressing non-verbal expressions of anxiety and grief	1.61	2.3	.003
Parents' anticipatory grief re: their child's diagnosis and potential outcome	1.67	2.27	.005
Asking about emotional needs of my patient's family	2.11	2.67	.005
Barriers to Palliative Care 0=not a barrier, 1=minor barrier, 2=moderate barrier, 3=major barrier			
Lack of nurse's knowledge about specialty PC	2.00	1.80	.38
Lack of access to the hospital's PC team	1.17	.93	.38
Lack of identification by advanced practice provider that patient is appropriate for PC	2.06	1.67	.19

Limitations

- Small number of participants in a single institution
- Covid-19 pandemic limited in-person learning
- Some participants attended virtually while working at the bedside due to high census and staffing shortages
- One or both surveys not completed by all participants



"It is important to be a companion to families during difficult times."
 "I learned it is equally important to meet physical and emotional needs of parents as it is to care for the baby."
 "Take time to talk to families about everyday things to allow a connection."
 "Compassionate communication."
 "Loved role-playing; so helpful to do in a safe space."

Purpose

This educational project's purpose is to improve NIC-RNs' knowledge, attitudes, confidence during PC conversations with parents of critically ill infants with uncertain outcomes.

Objectives:

- Define PC
- Demonstrate PC communication strategies
- Improve NIC-RN confidence and comfort when communicating with families of seriously ill infants



Acknowledgements/References

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