

Understanding Nurses' Experiences in Providing Palliative Care in Intensive Care Units: A Qualitative Inquiry

Introduction

Palliative care is an essential aspect of healthcare that focuses on improving the quality of life for patients with life-threatening illnesses and their families. In the context of intensive care units (ICUs), where patients are critically ill and often face complex medical challenges, the provision of palliative care can be particularly challenging for nurses. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of palliative care in ICUs, there is limited research on nurses' experiences in providing this type of care. This dissertation explores nurses' experiences in providing palliative care in ICUs, focusing on the challenges they face, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and the factors that influence their ability to provide effective palliative care.

The provision of palliative care in ICUs is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a deep understanding of the nurses' experiences at the forefront of this care. Nurses play a critical role in providing palliative care in ICUs, as they are often the primary caregivers for patients and their families and are responsible for managing symptoms, providing emotional support, and facilitating communication between patients, families, and other healthcare providers. However, palliative care in ICUs can be challenging for nurses, as they must balance the competing demands of providing life-sustaining treatments and ensuring patient comfort and quality of life.

Previous research has identified several challenges that nurses face in providing palliative care in ICUs, including inadequate training and education, limited resources and support, and the emotional toll of caring for critically ill patients and their families (Gélinas, Fillion, Robitaille, & Truchon, 2012; Montagnini, Smith, & Balistreri, 2012). However, there is a need for further research to explore the specific experiences of nurses in providing

palliative care in ICUs and to identify the strategies they use to overcome these challenges and provide effective care.

Research Questions

This dissertation aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of nurses in providing palliative care in ICUs?
2. What challenges do nurses face in providing palliative care in ICUs, and how do they overcome them?
3. What factors influence nurses' ability to provide effective palliative care in ICUs, and how do they impact their experiences?

By addressing these questions, this research will provide valuable insights into nurses' experiences in providing palliative care in ICUs. It will inform the development of strategies to support and enhance this critical aspect of care in these settings.

Literature Review

The literature review will provide a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge regarding palliative care in ICUs, focusing on nurses' experiences in providing this type of care. The review will begin by defining palliative care and its relevance to ICUs. It will then explore the various dimensions of palliative care in these settings, including symptom management, communication, and emotional support.

The review will then examine nurses' challenges in providing palliative care in ICUs, drawing on previous research in this area. For example, studies have identified inadequate training and education as a significant barrier to providing effective palliative care in ICUs (Aslakson, Curtis, & Nelson, 2014; Friedenberg, Levy, Ross, & Evans, 2012). Nurses may lack the knowledge and skills needed to manage complex symptoms, communicate effectively with patients and families, and provide emotional support in the face of life-threatening illness and death.

Other challenges identified in the literature include limited resources and support, such as inadequate staffing, lack of time, and limited access to specialist palliative care services

(Browning, 2013; Gélinas et al., 2012). Nurses may also face emotional challenges in providing palliative care in ICUs, including feelings of sadness, grief, and moral distress (Montagnini et al., 2012; St Ledger et al., 2013).

The literature review will also explore nurses' strategies to overcome these challenges and provide effective palliative care in ICUs. For example, studies have highlighted the importance of education and training in palliative care, including formal education programs and on-the-job training (Aslakson et al., 2014; Friedenbergl et al., 2012). Other strategies that have been identified include the use of multidisciplinary teams, the development of palliative care protocols and guidelines, and the provision of emotional support and self-care for nurses (Browning, 2013; Gélinas et al., 2012).

Finally, the review will examine the factors that influence nurses' ability to provide effective palliative care in ICUs, including individual factors such as nurses' attitudes and beliefs and organizational factors such as leadership, culture, and resources (Adams, Bailey, Anderson, & Docherty, 2011; Attia, Abd-Elaziz, & Kandeel, 2013). Understanding these factors is critical for developing strategies to support and enhance the provision of palliative care in ICUs.

Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews with nurses with experience providing palliative care in ICUs. Qualitative research is an appropriate approach for exploring the experiences and perceptions of individuals, as it allows for the collection of rich and detailed data that can provide insight into complex phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Sample

A purposive sampling strategy will be used to recruit participants for this study. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research questions (Patton, 2015). In this case, the criteria for inclusion in the study will be:

1. Registered nurses who have worked in an ICU for at least one year

2. Nurses who have experience providing palliative care to patients in the ICU
3. Nurses who are willing and able to participate in an in-depth interview

Based on previous qualitative studies in this area, a sample size of 20-30 nurses is anticipated (Adams et al., 2011; Attia et al., 2013). However, the final sample size will be determined by data saturation, which is the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data Collection

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with nurses. Semi-structured interviews involve using a flexible interview guide that allows for exploring key topics while also providing opportunities for participants to share their perspectives and experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The interview guide will be developed based on the research questions and the literature review findings. It will include questions about nurses' experiences providing palliative care in ICUs, the challenges they face, the strategies they use to overcome them, and the factors influencing their ability to provide effective care.

Interviews will be conducted in a private location that is convenient for participants. Each interview is expected to last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves a systematic process of coding and categorizing data to identify key themes and subthemes relevant to the research questions.

The analysis will begin with familiarization with the data, which involves reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the content. Based on the data, initial codes will then be generated, and these codes will be organized into potential themes and subthemes.

The themes and subthemes will be reviewed and refined through an iterative process of comparing and contrasting the data and considering the relationships between themes. The final themes will be named and defined and will be used to develop a comprehensive understanding of nurses' experiences providing palliative care in ICUs.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies will be employed. First, the researcher will engage in reflexivity, which involves acknowledging and examining one's biases and assumptions and considering how these may influence the research process (Berger, 2015).

Second, member checking will be used to verify the accuracy and credibility of the findings. This involves presenting the themes and subthemes to a subset of participants and asking for their feedback and validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Third, an audit trail will be maintained throughout the research process, which involves keeping detailed records of the data collection and analysis process, including field notes, memos, and coding decisions. This allows for transparency and reproducibility of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Finally, the findings will be presented with a thick description, which involves providing rich and detailed accounts of the participants' experiences and the context in which they occur. This allows readers to make their own judgments about the transferability of the findings to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Significance and Implications

This dissertation will significantly contribute to the understanding of nurses' experiences providing palliative care in ICUs and will inform the development of strategies to support and enhance this critical aspect of care. By exploring the challenges that nurses face, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and the factors that influence their ability to provide effective care, this research will provide valuable insights that can be used to improve the quality of palliative care in ICUs.

The findings of this study will have implications for nursing practice, education, and research. The findings can be used for practice to develop targeted interventions and support strategies to help nurses provide effective palliative care in ICUs. This may include education and training programs, the development of palliative care protocols and guidelines, and providing emotional support and self-care resources for nurses.

The findings can inform the development of curricula and training programs for nursing students and practicing nurses. This may include integrating palliative care content into nursing education programs and developing continuing education and professional development opportunities for nurses working in ICUs.

The findings can be used to identify areas for further investigation and to inform the development of future studies. This may include research on the effectiveness of specific interventions and support strategies and studies exploring the experiences of other healthcare providers involved in palliative care in ICUs.

Ultimately, this research has the potential to significantly impact the quality of care provided to patients and families in ICUs and support nurses in their critical role as providers of palliative care in these settings.

Conclusion

This dissertation prospectus outlines a qualitative study to explore nurses' experiences in providing palliative care in ICUs. By using semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of nurses, this study aims to provide a deep understanding of the challenges, strategies, and factors that influence nurses' ability to provide effective palliative care in these settings.

The findings of this study will have significant implications for nursing practice, education, and research. They will inform the development of strategies to support and enhance the provision of palliative care in ICUs. Ultimately, this research has the potential to improve the quality of care provided to patients and families in ICUs and to support nurses in their critical role as providers of this essential aspect of care.

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