

THE NEUROSCIENCE NURSE'S EXPERIENCE WITH END-OF-LIFE CARE

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to better understand neuroscience intensive care nurses' perceptions about their roles and responsibilities in the decision-making process about change in intensity of care, palliative care, and end-of-life care for the patients within the neuroscience intensive care unit (NICU) setting.

Method: Twelve NICU nurses were interviewed individually between February 2003 and February 2004. Investigators used grounded theory research techniques (i.e., constant comparison) to analyze the data (Glaser, 1978). Transcript data were analyzed line by line, and as concepts emerged they were compared with those from earlier interviews to establish similarities and differences.

Findings: The nurse caring for a patient at the end of life shepherds (i.e., guards, tends, cares for, and guides) from the middle, where he or she is positioned at the hub of the communication process. The nurse's goal is to facilitate communication between the patient's family members and physicians so that the patient's plan of care will be understandable and acceptable to all. Like a shepherd, the nurse in the end-of-life decision-making process, pushes or urges forward those with whom he or she communicates. The nurse communicates with the patient and the patient's loved ones and connections are made. Conversations about end-of-life care between the nurse and family members, as well as conversations between the nurse and physicians, are often guarded. Communicating with family members about this sensitive topic is an artful process. The nurse, who is *Shepherding from the Middle*, can vividly describe *What I See*, *How I Help*, and *What I Feel*.

Discussion: This study revealed perceptions of NICU nurses caring for patients who are approaching the end of life. Being in the middle of the communication process can be a lonely, challenging, yet rewarding place.

Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Advances in the methodology of grounded theory: Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology.