

EVALUATION OF END-OF-LIFE CARE: CRITICAL CARE NURSE LIAISON PROGRAM

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Purpose

The mission of the Critical Care Nurse Liaison Program at WellStar Health System is to incorporate the principles of palliative nursing, mental health nursing and ethics into the care of patients and families within the critical care units. Expert communication, education and psychological and social support are provided for critically ill and dying patients, their families, and staff throughout the course of critical illness, death, and bereavement. A registered nurse with extensive critical care experience and education in palliative care and ethics has provided this service for all patients/families in the critical care units (ICU, CCU) at WellStar Cobb Hospital for two years. For the purposes of program enhancement, validation and possible replication, this descriptive research project was designed to examine the patient and family experience through the lens of the primary family decision maker with focus on the quality of the education, support, and communication received from the Critical Care Nurse Liaison (CCNL).

Method

Family members having had contact with the CCNL that were most intimate with decision-making in the ICU/CCU were contacted no earlier than six months after the death by letter and then by telephone. Each volunteer was asked by a neutral research assistant to participate in a structured interview about his/her experience in the ICU/CCU and with the CCNL.

Findings

Answers to the following questions given by 20 family members will be discussed:

1. How often did resuscitation events precede death?
2. How often did patients have written Living Will and/or Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care?
3. To what extent did family members of the critically ill understand choices about treatment?
4. To what extent were final wishes of the patient discussed/honored?
5. To what extent were patient/family informed about the seriousness of the illness, the progress of the illness and the possibility of death?
6. To what extent was the Critical Care Liaison Nurse supportive to patients and their families?

Discussion

Among the family members who agreed to be interviewed, the overwhelming majority were pleased with the services received from the Critical Care Nurse Liaison. There were concerns expressed about having made the right decision and at times the details of the experience were difficult to recollect. This study demonstrated that there is definite value to the use of a designated individual with critical care experience that serves as a palliative care liaison with families in the highly charged, densely emotional and psychologically trying environment of end of life in critical care.