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## SPRITUALITY AND SPIRITUAL CARE: AN ESSENTIAL DAILY NEEDS IN INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (ICU)

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### ABSTRACT

*Spirituality and spiritual care in Intensive Care Units (ICUs) are essential elements in addressing the fundamental needs of patients under nursing care, particularly in the face of life-threatening illnesses. Research indicates that incorporating spirituality and spiritual care should be a core aspect of Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) within the nursing framework. It is crucial to understand that 'spirituality and spiritual care' should not be treated as an extra task on nurses' already full agendas; they must be recognized as integral responsibilities embedded in the daily routines and practices of nurses. **The objective of this article:** To explore the understanding and provision of spiritual care for critical care patients by ICU nurses. By taking the time to assess individual needs and purposefully engage with themes of meaning, hope, and peace, nurses can reconnect with the deeper essence of their profession. **Conclusion:** reconnecting with their spirituality can also empower nurses, enhancing their resilience in challenging roles. This article explores nursing care strategies for incorporating spiritual care into daily nursing practices and the important roles of intensive care nurses.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Spiritual care, spirituality, ICU nurse, Intensive Care Unit, spiritual needs.*

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Essential spirituality and spiritual care in ICU

More people are recognizing the deep importance of providing spiritual care in the intensive care unit (ICU) as a vital part of comprehensive patient care. Patients' coping strategies, emotional health, and overall quality of life during critical illness can be greatly affected by their spirituality, which includes a wide range of beliefs, practices, and cultural backgrounds. By incorporating spiritual care into their practice, healthcare providers can greatly improve the overall patient experience and effectively support the holistic well-being of those they care for, leading to more compassionate and patient-centered outcomes.

Spiritual care in clinical practice primarily emphasizes addressing the spiritual needs of patients and their families. This includes assisting in arranging for religious observance, providing existential support, and fostering a meaningful relationship with the transcendent. In the

intensive care unit (ICU), spiritual support continues to be an underachieved aspect of holistic care that is often overlooked. Assessment of spiritual and religious needs is essential and would serve as a crucial first step toward implementing effective spiritual care that truly supports patients and their families during challenging times (Eaton et al., 2022).

The absence of specific nursing interventions focused on spiritual care for critically ill patients reveals a significant gap in practice that requires attention (dos Santos et al., 2020). This issue is further intensified by the inadequate training healthcare professionals receive in spiritual care, which can undermine the holistic approach to patient care (dos Santos et al., 2020). The study indicates, that nurses with positive attitudes more ease to comply the spiritual care (Kang et al., 2021). This is corroborated by findings demonstrating a direct link between nurses' spiritual perceptions and their ability to deliver effective spiritual care (Elsayed, 2023). Additionally, incorporating spiritual care into nursing education is vital for enhancing nurses' skills and capacity to effectively meet patients' spiritual needs (Ramadhan et al., 2020).

Chaplains and spiritual caregivers are also essential in the ICU environment, as their involvement can improve the quality of care for patients and families, especially in end-of-life situations. Research indicates that proactive chaplaincy involvement can facilitate better decision-making and provide crucial support to surrogates (dos Santos et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there is a need for improved integration of chaplains within the multidisciplinary team, as their contributions are often underused (Giebner, 2017). The spiritual care assessment and intervention framework designed for ICU settings seeks to promote this integration, ensuring that spiritual care is a fundamental aspect of patient management rather than an afterthought (dos Santos et al., 2020). Family members of ICU patients endure considerable spiritual distress, necessitating attention to their spiritual needs alongside those of the patients. Research shows that family satisfaction with spiritual care is a strong predictor of overall satisfaction with ICU care (S. Willemse et al., 2020). However, misunderstandings about the role of spiritual health practitioners can impede the delivery of spiritual support to families (Ordons et al., 2020). Educating healthcare providers on the importance of spiritual care for families can increase receptiveness to such support and enhance the overall care experience. The relationship between spirituality and health outcomes is well-established, with evidence indicating that addressing spiritual needs can improve coping strategies, diminish psychological distress, and enhance patients' quality of life (Willemse et al., 2023).

Spiritual care has been shown to favorably affect patients' emotional well-being, particularly in high-stress settings like the ICU (Willemse et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of incorporating spiritual assessments into routine care practices, as they can guide care plans and improve patient-centered approaches (Badanta et al., 2021). Despite the acknowledged significance of spiritual care, barriers to its implementation continue to exist. Many healthcare professionals express feeling unprepared to address spiritual needs due to insufficient training and resources (dos Santos et al., 2020). This underscores the necessity for systematic reviews and training initiatives aimed at equipping clinicians with the essential skills for providing spiritual care (Ferrell et al., 2020). Furthermore, cultivating an environment that promotes open discussions about spirituality can help normalize these conversations within clinical settings, ultimately benefiting both patients and healthcare providers (Ahmadi et al., 2019). By doing so, the healthcare community can ensure that patients receive comprehensive care that respects their spiritual dimensions, ultimately leading to better outcomes and satisfaction in the ICU.

Spiritual care in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) represents a comprehensive and compassionate approach that thoughtfully addresses the spiritual needs of both patients and their families during periods of critical illness. This vital care encompasses a wide range of diverse practices specifically designed to foster emotional support, enhance coping mechanisms, and holistically promote overall well-being. Spiritual care should not be regarded merely as an adjunct to medical treatment; it is, in fact, an essential and integral component of holistic patient care that acknowledges and recognizes the profound influence of spiritual health results of patients. The significance of spiritual care in the ICU is underscored by its potential to significantly improve both patient and family satisfaction levels during some of the most trying times. Research has consistently demonstrated that when spiritual needs are effectively and sensitively addressed, there is a remarkable and noticeable increase in overall satisfaction with the care received in the ICU setting (Cetin&Ozen, 2024). This is particularly crucial in high-stress environments where patients and their families are faced with overwhelming uncertainty, fear, and emotional turmoil. Spiritual care has the unique capacity to alleviate anxiety and depression, thereby enhancing life satisfaction even during the most challenging and distressing times (Klimasinski, 2021).

Spiritual care practices, which include fostering open and honest discussions about end-of-life preferences and concerns, have been associated with increased family satisfaction and enhanced experiences in the ICU setting (Burkhart et al., 2023). By addressing spiritual aspects, healthcare providers can cultivate a more supportive environment that respects the beliefs of patients and families while promoting peace and understanding during critical times. Providing effective spiritual care in the ICU necessitates that healthcare providers possess strong communication skills and a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved. Nurses are crucial in this process, as they are often the primary caregivers who interact continuously with patients and their families. Spiritual communication, which involves active listening, nonverbal signals, and empathetic interaction, is essential for identifying and integrating patients' spiritual needs into their clinical care (Laili et al., 2019). However, many nurses feel unprepared to offer spiritual care due to inadequate training and unfamiliarity with spiritual health practices (dos Santos et al., 2020). This educational gap can hinder the ability to provide holistic care that effectively addresses both physical and spiritual health aspects.

The involvement of chaplains and spiritual care providers is also crucial in the ICU. Their participation can significantly improve the spiritual care provided to patients and families, especially during critical discussions about end-of-life decisions (VrMeer, 2021). Research shows that the proactive involvement of chaplains in the ICU not only enhances decision-making but also offers vital emotional support to families in challenging situations (Saeid et al., 2021). However, there is often a disconnect between chaplains and healthcare providers, which can limit the effectiveness of spiritual care interventions (RozeOrdons et al., 2018). Therefore, enhanced collaboration and communication among the multidisciplinary team are essential for effectively integrating spiritual care into standard clinical practice.

Barriers to effective spiritual care in the ICU include common misconceptions about the role of spiritual health practitioners and a general lack of awareness regarding the benefits of spiritual support (Smiechowski et al., 2021). Many healthcare professionals may not fully understand how spiritual care can positively affect patient outcomes, leading to the underutilization of available spiritual care resources. Educational programs focused on spiritual care can bridge this essential gap, equipping healthcare providers with the skills needed to address patients' and families' spiritual needs meaningfully (dos Santos et al., 2020). Additionally, fostering an environment

that promotes open conversations about spirituality can normalize these discussions and significantly improve the overall care experience for everyone involved.

The connection between spirituality and health outcomes is well-established, with evidence consistently indicating that addressing spiritual needs can enhance coping strategies and reduce psychological distress (Willemse et al., 2020). Spiritual care has been shown to positively influence patients' emotional well-being, particularly in high-stress settings like the ICU (Willemse et al., 2020). This underscores the importance of incorporating spiritual assessments into routine care practices, as these evaluations can guide care plans and improve patient-centered approaches (de Diego-Cordero et al., 2022).

In addition, spiritual care in the ICU is a vital component of comprehensive patient management, addressing both the emotional and spiritual needs of patients and their families. As healthcare providers deepen their understanding of the importance of spirituality in the healing process, it is crucial to develop training programs and frameworks that support the effective delivery of spiritual care. By doing so, the healthcare community can ensure that patients receive thorough care that honors their spiritual needs, ultimately leading to better outcomes and greater satisfaction in the ICU environment (Smiechowski et al., 2021).

### **What is spiritual care for ventilated ICU patients?**

Spiritual care for patients on ventilators in the ICU is a crucial aspect of holistic healthcare, addressing the complex emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs of individuals who cannot communicate due to their medical conditions (S. J. Willemse et al., 2017). This care is particularly important in the ICU, where patients may be in life-threatening situations and experience deep existential anxiety. Offering spiritual support not only benefits the patients but also provides comfort to their families, who often grapple with intense worry and uncertainty about their loved ones' health (Klimasinski, 2021).

A key element of spiritual care for these patients is recognizing that they still have spiritual needs, even if they cannot express them verbally. Research shows that meeting these needs can significantly improve the quality of care and satisfaction for both patients and their families, as highlighted by (Papathanasiou et al., 2019). Spiritual care may involve various approaches, such as facilitating family communication, providing tailored emotional support, and creating opportunities for prayer or quiet reflection, even when the patient cannot actively engage (Burkhart et al., 2023) (Laili et al., 2020). For example, nurses can use nonverbal communication and active listening to gauge the patient's emotional state and provide comfort through their presence, fostering a sense of security and connection (Laili et al., 2020).

Chaplains and spiritual care providers play a vital role in this setting. They offer specialized support that enhances the medical care provided by the ICU team, improving the overall care experience. Research indicates that chaplains' involvement with ventilated patients can lead to greater family satisfaction and more productive end-of-life discussions (Ferrell et al., 2020). They can help facilitate important discussions about the patient's wishes and values, which is crucial when patients cannot communicate their preferences due to sedation or mechanical ventilation (Klimasinski, 2021). This proactive approach to spiritual care empowers families to navigate complex decision-making during critical times, providing guidance and reassurance.

Furthermore, the spiritual care needs of patients on ventilators often intersect with the cultural and religious beliefs of both the patients and their families. It is essential for healthcare providers

to recognize these beliefs and incorporate them into individualized care plans. A recent study emphasized that addressing patients' spiritual needs while respecting their cultural and religious backgrounds greatly enhances family satisfaction with ICU care (Nissen et al., 2021). This culturally sensitive approach ensures that care is respectful and tailored to the unique needs of each patient and family, promoting a more inclusive healthcare environment.

Despite the acknowledged significance of spiritual care, there are considerable barriers to its implementation within the ICU. Many healthcare professionals feel unprepared to address spiritual needs, often citing insufficient training and resources as contributing factors (Camacho-Montaña et al., 2021). This educational gap can impede the delivery of comprehensive spiritual care, particularly in the high-pressure environment typical of the ICU (Willemse et al., 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to offer targeted training for healthcare providers that highlights the importance of spiritual care and effective communication strategies, boosting their confidence in fulfilling these critical needs (Willemse et al., 2017).

Spiritual care for ventilated ICU patients is an essential part of holistic healthcare that addresses the deep spiritual and emotional needs of both patients and their families. Recognizing the crucial role of spirituality in the healing process and fostering collaboration among healthcare providers, chaplains, and families can create a nurturing environment within the ICU (S. Willemse et al., 2020). This atmosphere greatly enhances the care experience for everyone involved. It is vital to prioritize ongoing training and education for healthcare professionals to ensure that spiritual care is integrated into everyday practice. Ultimately, this collaborative effort improves satisfaction for patients and their families in the ICU, highlighting the importance of spiritual care in the overall healthcare journey (Hawthorne & Gordon, 2020).

### **Role ICU nurse of spiritual care**

The role of ICU nurses in delivering spiritual care is increasingly recognized as a vital and indispensable component of holistic patient management in critical care settings. Spiritual care encompasses a wide array of practices aimed at addressing the emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs of patients and their families, particularly during times of crisis such as those experienced in the ICU (Cetin & Ozen, 2024). One of the primary responsibilities of ICU nurses in providing spiritual care is to establish a supportive and compassionate environment that fosters healing and comfort. This involves simple yet profound interventions, such as being fully present with the patient, actively listening to their concerns, and engaging in open-ended conversations about their spiritual beliefs and needs (Laili et al., 2019). Research indicates that when nurses initiate dialogues about spirituality, it can significantly enhance the emotional well-being of both patients and their families (Laili et al., 2019). By fostering an atmosphere of trust and openness, nurses can facilitate the expression of patients' fears, hopes, and spiritual concerns, which is crucial in the high-stress and often chaotic ICU environment (Oluma & Abadiga, 2020). Moreover, the understanding of patients' spiritual needs is essential for nurses to provide effective spiritual care that truly resonates with patients and their families. Studies have shown that nurses who possess a strong awareness of their patients' spiritual values and beliefs are better equipped to meet those needs effectively (Noome et al., 2017). This awareness can be cultivated through targeted education and training programs that emphasize the importance of spiritual care in nursing practice. For instance, ICU nurses often report a pressing need for more education regarding end-of-life care and the spiritual dimensions associated with it (Noome et al., 2017). By enhancing their knowledge and skills in spiritual care, nurses can significantly improve their



ability to support patients and families during these critical moments of vulnerability and uncertainty(Eaton et al., 2022).

### **Questions to Guide Self-Reflection**

#### **How do personal feelings and thoughts influence the delivery of spiritual care, fostering personal growth and alignment with holistic nursing practices?**

- How do I feel when addressing the spiritual needs of patients and their families in critical situations?
- Does the responsibility of addressing spiritual care feel overwhelming, manageable, or fulfilling to me?
- How does providing spiritual care affect my emotional well-being and resilience as a nurse?
- How do I feel about collaborating with chaplains or other spiritual care providers in the ICU?
- How do I feel about engaging in self-reflection to deepen my own spiritual understanding?
- How does my own spirituality or lack thereof influence how I feel about providing spiritual care?
- Am I open to learning more about the diverse spiritual and cultural needs of my patients?

The integration of spiritual care into nursing practice also requires a genuine commitment to self-reflection and personal spiritual development among nurses. Research suggests that nurses who are attuned to their spirituality are more likely to recognize and effectively address the spiritual needs of their patients (Care, 2017). This self-awareness can lead to a more compassionate and empathetic approach to care, allowing nurses to connect with patients on a deeper and more meaningful level. Additionally, the emotional toll of working in the ICU can have a profound impact on nurses' spiritual well-being, making it imperative for them to engage in self-care practices that nurture their spiritual health and resilience (Burkhart et al., 2023). Nurses always serve as vital intermediaries between patients, families, and spiritual care providers, facilitating meaningful discussions about spiritual needs and preferences (Hawthorne & Gordon, 2020). By working together, nurses and chaplains can create a comprehensive care plan that addresses both the medical and spiritual dimensions of patient care holistically (Ferrell et al., 2020). This collaborative approach not only enhances the quality of care provided but also ensures that patients' spiritual needs are acknowledged and respected throughout their ICU stay (Abusafia et al., 2021).

Despite the recognized importance of spiritual care, several barriers to its implementation persist in the ICU setting. High workloads, time constraints, and a lack of adequate training in spiritual care can hinder nurses' ability to provide this essential aspect of patient care (Abusafia et al., 2021). Additionally, some nurses may feel uncomfortable discussing spiritual matters due to personal beliefs or a lack of confidence in their ability to address such sensitive topics. Addressing these barriers through targeted training programs and institutional support can empower nurses to incorporate spiritual care into their daily practice more effectively and meaningfully. In conclusion, ICU nurses play a crucial and transformative role in providing spiritual care to patients and their families. By fostering a supportive environment, enhancing their understanding of diverse spiritual needs, engaging in self-reflection, and collaborating with

spiritual care providers, nurses can significantly impact the emotional and spiritual well-being of those in their care (Camacho-Montaña et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSION

Spiritual care in the ICU is an indispensable component of holistic patient care, addressing the emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions that are often overlooked in critical care environments. This paper highlights the profound impact that integrating spiritual care has on the well-being of both patients and their families, emphasizing the need for healthcare providers, particularly ICU nurses, to engage in compassionate, patient-centered practices. By fostering open communication, understanding diverse spiritual needs, and collaborating with chaplains and spiritual caregivers, nurses can create a supportive environment that enhances healing, reduces distress, and promotes peace.

The barriers to implementing spiritual care, including inadequate training and time constraints, underscore the urgent need for education and institutional support to empower healthcare professionals. By equipping nurses with the skills and confidence to provide spiritual care, healthcare systems can ensure that this critical aspect of care is no longer an afterthought but an integral part of everyday clinical practice. Ultimately, recognizing and addressing the spiritual needs of patients in the ICU not only improves satisfaction and outcomes but also reaffirms the humanity and compassion at the heart of nursing care.

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