

The Meaning of Intensive Care Unit Experience as Perceived by the Nurses, Patients and Family Members

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The intensive care unit experience affects patients; however, it also affects the nurse as the care provider as well as the family, the significant other. There is a paucity of research studies conducted on this triad of nurses, patients, and family members. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and illuminate the meaning of the intensive care unit experiences of the patients, their family members and nurses during critical illness in the intensive care unit. Using Van Manen's phenomenological method, this study was able to elucidate the experiential descriptions, essential relationships, and meaning structures of the intensive care unit experiences of the fifteen participants during critical illness. Through storytelling and dialogue, the participants revealed their lived experience, including their descriptions and perceptions about the meaning of intensive care unit in their lives. Content analysis revealed five integrating common themes, three specific themes and corresponding descriptors. The five common themes were: family as a unit, physical care and or comfort, physiological care, psychosocial support, and transformation. The three specific themes were: advocacy, uncertainty, and confidence in the nurse and healthcare team. It is my belief that the nursing knowledge learned from this study, used cautiously, provides insight into how these experiences can influence nursing practice, education, and future research. This study affirms the mutual influence among the family, patient and nurse during a critical illness experience. The findings also support the tenets of family-centered care, which mandates the purposeful inclusion of the family in all aspects of care.