

# Two Simulated ICU Rooms Rated by BSN Students: When Patient Cannot Speak

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## Background

In the face of sudden illness or injury, admission to an intensive care unit (ICU) may be inevitable. Patients in the ICU often require mechanical ventilation through an artificial airway which makes verbal communication impossible. The inability to speak, along with compounding factors that influence level of consciousness, often complicate communication between the nurse and the patient, contributing to frustration.

Nurses generally care deeply and strive to provide competent care. Going beyond the task list at hand, how can nurses connect with the human beings they care for and their significant others to create a bond that can only come from genuine caring? Photographs can potentially create a sense of commonality that connects nurses with people in their care, especially those that cannot speak for themselves. It was hypothesized that patient photographs hung at the entrance of the ICU room could increase a bedside nurse's ability to genuinely care for a mechanically ventilated, sedated patient.

## Review of the Literature

There is a wealth of information in the literature discussing the impact of mechanical ventilation on communication between the nurse and the patient in the ICU (Dithole, Simbanda, Moleki & Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, 2016) and communication strategies (Happ et al, 2011).

Nursing theory and discussion related to caring as an integral component of human nature and nursing are widely discussed (Benner & Wrubel, 1988; Caine, 1991; Forrest, 1988; Watson, 2010).

Perceptions of the ICU experience and caring as reported by patients, family, and nurses are abundant (Cypress, 2010; Nantz & Hines, 2015; Schmidt 2003). Few reports of images triggering empathy can be found (Zeeberg, 2016). No reports or discussions were found connecting the impact of photographs on nurse caring. None of the references included nursing students in their publications.

## Method

Participants were 66 third year and 64 first year BSN undergraduate students. In the simulation center, students visited two ICU rooms with an artificial machine representing a male patient who was sedated, not moving, wrists restrained, colorful waveform continuously flowing bedside monitor. Various machines are producing subtle, rhythmic beeps and humming sounds. Bags of fluid are hanging on poles with pumps regulating their flow. There is a bag hanging on the side of the bed with yellow urine in it. Patient has a long tube inserted through the nostril which is threaded into the stomach. The only difference between the two ICU rooms is collage of pictures on the door. The pictures include the male patient with his dogs, sons, daughters, and spouse.

Students spend several minutes in each room. Students complete a semantic differential questionnaire rating: (1) ICU room environments (eight adjective comparisons), (2) rate RN verbal and nonverbal communication (10 adjective comparisons), (3) students imagine they are RNs and rate their professional experience in the two rooms (10 adjective comparisons), and (4) students imagine they are a family member and rate the two ICU rooms (10 adjective comparisons). Number of semantic differential adjective comparisons was 38.

## Findings

Using SPSS 25, a Dependent *t*-test analysis compared the ICU Room #1 with ICU Room #2 (collage of pictures). ICU Room #2 had higher means on all comparisons. The 130 participants rating were statistically significant ranging from  $p=.001$  to  $p=.042$ .

An Independent *t*-test compared the third year and first year students. There were no significant differences between the first year (no clinical experience) the third year students (1.5 years of clinical experience) on comparisons of ICU Room #2 (college of pictures). On adjective comparisons of ICU Room #1, first year students had higher means than third year students. The 24 significant comparisons ranged from  $p=.001$  to  $p=.034$ .

## Conclusions

BSN students (N=130) rated the ICU Room #2 with the collage of pictures on the door a more positively from the perspective of the environment, visualizing a RN with the patient, imagining self as an RN, and imagining self as a family member. Future research will explore differences among nursing students with two and three years of clinical experience.

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