

Coping with Death: The Experience of Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) Nurses

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Introduction

- ❖ PICU nurses enter into intense therapeutic relationships with patients and families despite the repeated emotional toil of experiencing profound loss and death (Rashotte, Fothergill-Bourbonnais, & Chamberlain, 1997).
- ❖ This toil can have emotional, physical, and intellectual repercussions.
- ❖ It has been noted in the literature that nurses create a “curtain” to protect themselves from grief allowing them to remain focused on the tasks associated with care of the dying patient (Gerow et al., 2010).
- ❖ There is increasing concern that the repeated exposure to these stressful events can have a negative effect on the well-being of the nurse (Curcio, 2017; Stayer & Lockhart, 2016).

Study Aim

- ❖ The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of how Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) nurses cope with death in their patients, what support strategies are needed to care for the nursing staff and how best to promote long-term job retention.

Methods

- ❖ Qualitative study design was used with semi-structured interviews.
- ❖ Phenomenological methodology was used to extract meaning of the lived experiences.

Study Participants

- ❖ Registered nurses working in PICU who had experienced at least one death.
- ❖ Institutional Review Board approval was obtained.
- ❖ Written consent was obtained from all subjects prior to participation in study.

Discussion

- ❖ Debriefings were mentioned frequently as a means to help process the immediate event.
- ❖ Grieving was different amongst the nursing staff and often related to the individual patient situations and other life circumstances.
- ❖ Identified need for quiet space and staffing considerations during & after the death of a child.
- ❖ Identified the need for additional education on communicating during difficult circumstances.

Conclusion

- ❖ Peer group is very important to coping and dealing with intense PICU environment.
- ❖ Dealing with death does have an affect on the PICU nurse.
- ❖ Supporting and promoting a healthy work environment is essential to long term physical, emotional, and professional well-being.

References

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Results

- Eleven nurses participated in study (34%)
- Common themes emerged (Diagram 1)
- Range of coping mechanisms identified
- Variety of responses as to what resources are needed to best support individually and as a team.

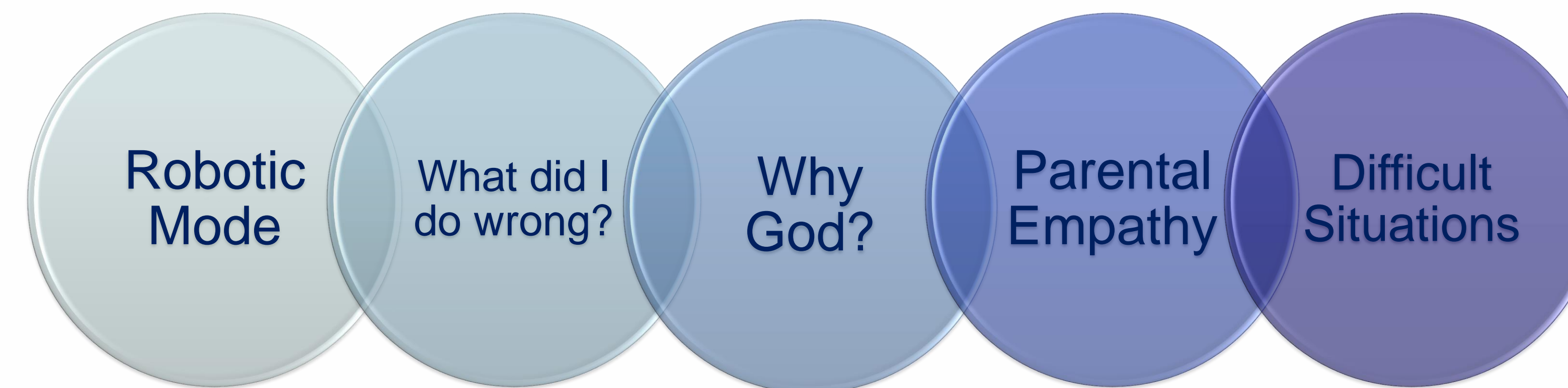


Diagram 1: Common Themes derived from interviews with nurses

