

The Impact of Child Death on Nurses

Sorcha Cantwell (17061140@brookes.ac.uk)

Introduction:

This literature review explored the impact of paediatric patient death on nurses working in acute settings. The review investigates how experiences may differ between nurses, and subsequent impacts. This topic area was chosen due to placement experiences of a child dying, and a lack of support available to staff. A desire to investigate this concept and to compare support more widely, was developed, thus generating the research question.

Method:

This research was carried out in the form of a systematic literature review using three databases; CINAHL, PsycInfo and PubMed. These databases covered the healthcare, psychological and medical approaches to the research area. Through systematic inclusion and exclusion criteria, six papers were identified and critically appraised. Thematic analysis was carried out and three key themes with 10 subthemes were identified across the literature, relating to the experiences of nurses regarding paediatric patient death.

“The impact of moral distress on paediatric nurses may hinder their ability to provide effective care; an unrecognized cost within the healthcare provision” (Mekechuck, 2006)

Primary aim:

To explore the impact of paediatric patient deaths on nurses in community settings. After identifying a lack of evidence in this area, the study was broadened to include nurses working in acute settings.

Objective:

To identify what is known, and areas where further research is needed, as identified by nurses experiencing these situations first hand, on a relatively frequent basis.

Conclusions:

- The literature review identified a **distinct lack of research** into the impacts faced by nurses in community settings, and therefore highlights the need for substantial future research into this area.
- **Improved nurse education** is needed to prepare Children’s nurses for what they are likely to experience in their future careers, and allow them to establish an appropriate support system.
- In literature relating to the acute setting, it is apparent that child deaths have **varying levels of impact on nurses**, and this impact should not be ignored.
- The support in place for nurses is **varied**, but often lacking, and this can have detrimental impacts.
- **Standardised protocols** should be implemented both locally and nationally to ensure an adequate support provision for nurses. This would ensure reduced personal cost, as well as cost to health providers through burnout and staff attrition.

Mekechuck, J. (2006) Moral distress in the paediatric intensive care unit: the impact on paediatric nurses. *Leadership in Health Services*, 19(3), pp.1-6.

Extensive further research required

Nurse education must be improved

Differing levels of impact on nurses

Support is varied and often limited

Standardised protocols are needed for support provision

Findings:

Three key themes identified::

Factors influencing nurses abilities to cope with paediatric patient death

Striking a balance between therapeutic and practical care

Communication challenges

Nurses’ spiritual beliefs

Cause of death

Personal attributes of the nurse

Factors to consider in the time preceding death

The journey to death

Important areas of nursing care

The voice of the child and nurse

Consequences faced by nurses

Psychological consequences

Physical consequences

Personal consequences

These themes are incredibly important in identifying support strategies for nurses, and discussing where future research should be directed, in order to improve these provisions.

