The Impact of Child Death on Nurses

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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.

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.

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.

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.

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.