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## Thematic framework of stressors experienced by ICU nurses towards end-of-life care

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### Abstract

Working in Intensive Care Unit is traumatic and challenging for nurses as they are exposed to death and dying regularly. A Qualitative study was done and data was analysed using open code software 4.02 to identify the stressors experienced By ICU Nurses towards End of Life Care and based on that a thematic framework was designed which explains the stressors experienced by ICU Nurses towards End of Life Care and suggests actions to cope up with the stressors.

**Keywords:** Thematic framework, stressors, ICU nurses, open code software

### Introduction

Nursing is generally perceived as demanding profession. Along with the increased demand and progress in the nursing profession, stress among the nurses has also increased. Stress is experienced when demands made on us outweigh our resources. It is usually observed that nursing profession undergoes tremendous stress which affect on work performances of nurses and ultimately affects the patient care. Chronic stress takes a toll when there are additional stress factors like home stress, conflict at work, inadequate staffing, poor teamwork, inadequate training, and poor supervision. Stress is known to cause emotional exhaustion in nurses and lead to negative feelings toward those in their care. Burnout and low Job satisfaction indeed contributes into the Nurses inefficiency and affects their dedication to job quality and care given.

End of Life Care is the network of medical and support services, including palliative care, hospice, psychological counselling, and legal assistance, provided to individuals in the last stages of a terminal illness. (The American Heritage Medical Dictionary 2007) [6].

Although death, grief, and mourning are universally accepted aspects of living, the values, expectations and practices during serious illness, as death approaches and after deaths are culturally bound and expressed. Health care providers may share very similar values concerning end-of-life care and may find that they are inadequately prepared to assess for and implement care plans that support culturally diverse perspectives. Nurses need to develop skill and comfort in assessing patients and families responses to serious illnesses and planning interventions that support their values and choices throughout the continuum of care. (Brunner & Suddarth's 2012) [2].

### Research methodology

#### Research approach

A qualitative, phenomenological descriptive approach was used to explore and describe the stressors experienced by nurses working in ICU towards End of Life Care. Themes and sub-themes emerged and the thematic framework was developed. Themes and sub-themes are described

#### Theme 1: Emotional stressor

This theme demonstrates the stress felt by ICU nurses by bearing in mind the augmented suffering of the patient and development of an emotional bond while providing End of Life Care.

#### Their experiences are expressed in 3subthemes

- Deteriorating Condition
- Sympathetic approach
- Grief of family members

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**Theme: 2 Conflicting Demands**

Conflicting demands explains about the work overload and expectations from staff that makes them over burdened which further leads to burnout and decreased efficacy that causes frustration and dissatisfaction among them.

**Under this theme sub-themes are**

- Staff Crisis
- Excessive Documentation
- Prolonged Duty Hours

**Theme: 3 Professional Stressor**

This theme exhibits the stressors felt and difficulty faced by the participants due to lack of palliative care approach, professional in-competencies and inter-professional issues at workplace.

**Under this there are three sub-themes**

- Lack of End of Life Care competencies
- Inter-professional conflicts
- Lack of Palliative care approach

**Theme 4: Personal Stressor**

This theme describes the stressors experienced by the

participants due to their own personal perceptions and thinking.

Under this theme there are 3 sub-themes

Counter-Transference

Duration of Care

Age factor

**Theme 5:** This theme tends to explain the stressors experienced by critical care nurses when they did first time End of Life Care. It also exhibits the stressor among critical care nurses due to past memories of death and dying condition.

**It consists of two sub-themes**

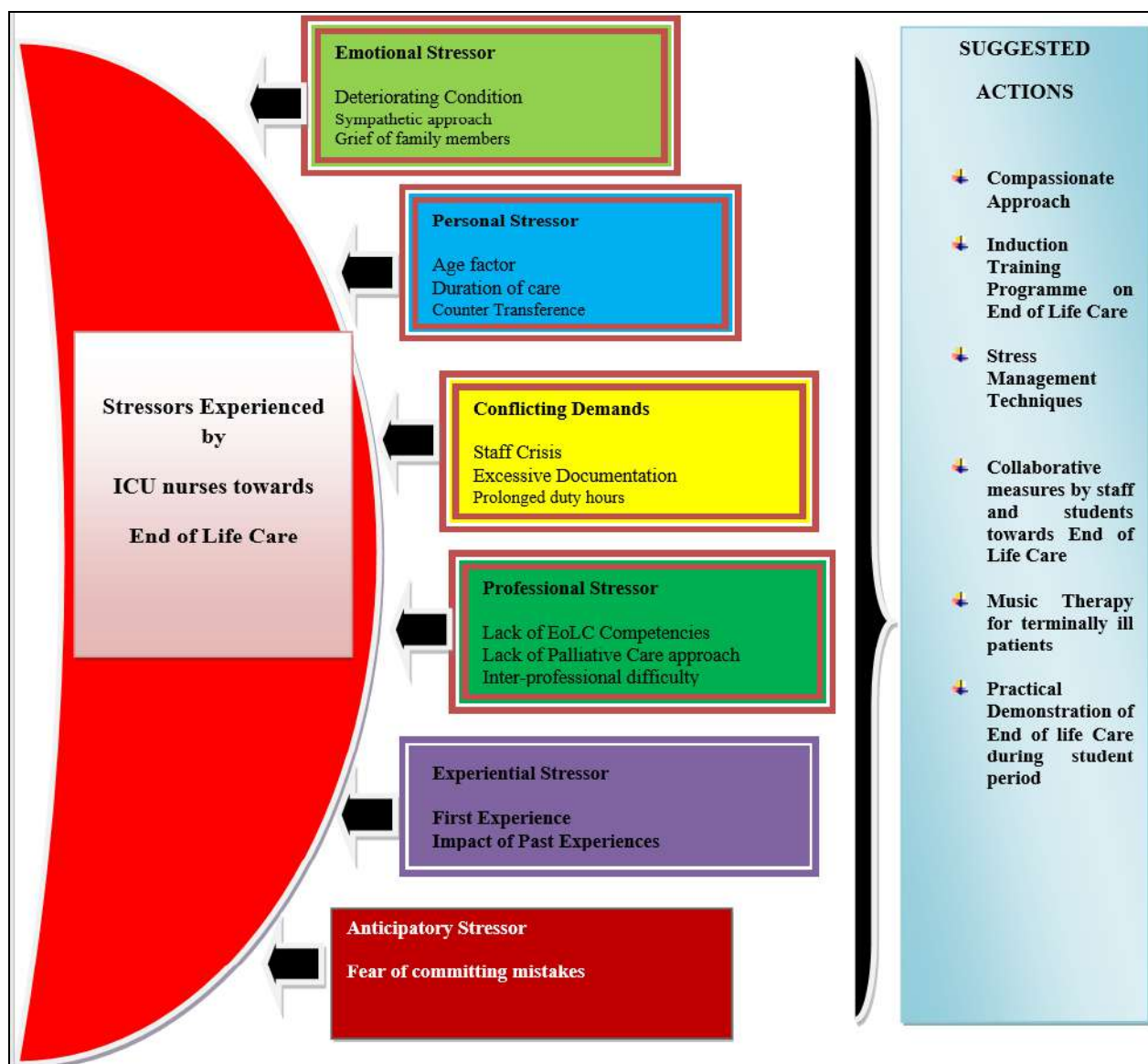
- First Experience
- Impact of Past Experiences

**Theme 6: Anticipatory Stressor**

This theme exhibits the stressor experienced by the participants because of their anticipated fear of committing mistakes while caring a terminally ill patient.

**This theme consists of 1 sub-theme**

- Fear of Committing Mistakes



**Fig 1:** Thematic Framework of Stressors Experienced by ICU nurses towards End-of-Life Care

## Discussion and Conclusion

End-of-life care in the intensive care unit (ICU) has received little attention in the literature in comparison to the considerable amount of existing literature available on EoLC in other areas of nursing. The ethos of the ICU is to preserve life, but as many patients die in this environment, End of Life Care should be an integral part of the ICU nurse's role. A study of the lived experiences of registered nurses who have provided end-of-life care within an intensive care unit revealed that ICU nurses do not feel adequately prepared to give proficient EOLC. Those who felt more confident in End of Life Care had learned what to do over time. Appropriate training, support and improved communication between staff, patients and families is necessary for good End of Life Care in ICUs. (Holms N.2014)<sup>[9]</sup>.

This study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the stressors experienced by ICU nurses providing End of Life Care and thematic framework was developed which not only explained the stressors experienced but also suggested the coping methods.

## Conflict of Interest

Not available

## Financial Support

Not available

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