



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Needs of relatives of critically ill patients in an academic hospital in Chile<sup>☆</sup>

C. Padilla-Fortunatti (RN, MSN (c))<sup>a,b</sup>, N. Rojas-Silva (RN, MSN)<sup>a,\*</sup>,  
M. Amthauer-Rojas (RN)<sup>b</sup>, Y. Molina-Muñoz (Mgtr.)<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Escuela de Enfermería, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

<sup>b</sup> Unidad de Paciente Crítico, Hospital Clínico Red de Salud UC-CHRISTUS, Santiago, Chile

<sup>c</sup> Escuela de Psicología, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Santiago, Chile

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**KEYWORDS**

Family;  
Family nursing;  
Needs assessment;  
Intensive care units;  
Professional-family  
relations;  
Adult

**Abstract**

**Objective:** To identify the importance of the needs of family members of patients in an intensive care unit (ICU).

**Method:** Descriptive, comparative and cross-sectional study based on a secondary data analysis of 251 relatives of ICU patients at a university hospital in Santiago, Chile. Using non-random sampling, the 'Critical Care Family Needs Inventory' was used to establish the family needs, as well as a sociodemographic questionnaire that included: age, gender, educational level, patient relationship and previous ICU experience. A descriptive statistical analysis, Student's *t*-test and ANOVA were performed.

**Results:** The most important family needs related to the dimensions of 'security' (mean = 3.90) and 'information' (mean = 3.76), while those of minor importance with 'support' (mean = 3.09). In the latter, differences were observed at an older age ( $p < 0.05$ ), an educational level ( $p < 0.001$ ) and relationship with the patient ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** The most relevant needs for family members in the ICU are related to safety and information. Less important needs are influenced by certain sociodemographic variables. Identifying the degree of importance of family needs will allow the health team to improve its relationship with families in ICUs.

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [nprojas@uc.cl](mailto:nprojas@uc.cl) (N. Rojas-Silva).

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**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Familia;  
Enfermería de la familia;  
Evaluación de necesidades;  
Unidades de cuidados intensivos;  
Relaciones profesional-familia;  
Adulto

**Necesidades de los familiares de pacientes críticos en un hospital académico de Chile****Resumen**

**Objetivo:** Identificar el grado de importancia de las necesidades de los familiares de pacientes en una unidad de cuidados intensivos (UCI).

**Método:** Estudio descriptivo, comparativo y transversal realizado a partir de un análisis secundario de datos de 251 familiares de pacientes de una UCI en un hospital universitario en Santiago, Chile. Utilizando un muestreo no aleatorio se aplicó el instrumento *Critical Care Family Needs Inventory* para conocer las necesidades familiares, además de un cuestionario sociodemográfico que incluyó: edad, género, nivel educacional, relación con el paciente y experiencia previa en UCI. Se realizó análisis estadístico descriptivo, prueba t de Student y ANOVA.

**Resultados:** Las necesidades familiares más importantes se relacionaron con las dimensiones de «seguridad» ( $\bar{X} = 3,90$ ) e «información» ( $\bar{X} = 3,76$ ), mientras que las de menor importancia se relacionaron con la de «apoyo» ( $\bar{X} = 3,09$ ). En esta última, se observaron diferencias a mayor edad ( $p < 0,05$ ), nivel educacional ( $p < 0,001$ ) y relación con el paciente ( $p < 0,05$ ).

**Conclusiones:** Las necesidades más relevantes para los familiares en la UCI se relacionan con la seguridad e información. Las necesidades de menor importancia están influidas por ciertas variables sociodemográficas. La identificación del grado de importancia de las necesidades familiares permitirá al equipo de salud mejorar su relación con las familias en las UCI.

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**What is known/what is the contribution of this?**

The admission of a loved one to an intensive care unit is a stressful event for the patient as well as their family. In this context, family members experience specific needs which, if they are identified and satisfied, may reduce the psychological burden of this experience.

This study is the first report on critical patient family needs in a Spanish-speaking country in Latin America. Its results confirm the importance of aspects connected with information delivery, regardless of the cultural and sociodemographic context of the family members studied. It also sets a challenge for nurses who work in intensive care units, as they should establish effective communication with the family members of critical patients in a context in which there is a high demand for care.

**Implications of the study**

This study has made it possible to identify the most important needs of family members of the patients in an intensive care unit in a teaching hospital. In terms of care, the needs of family members must be detected using validated questionnaires on their opinions and those of the healthcare team. This way the resulting knowledge is made available for use by critical healthcare managers and administrators, so that they can develop and apply quality indicators associated with satisfying the needs of family members. In this way the needs of critical patients' families will become an area of research that should continue to be developed, by studying interventions that improve communication with the care team, regular assessments of their degree of satisfaction or awareness of the degree to which health institutions are prepared to consider this subject as a priority.

**Introduction**

Within hospitals, intensive care units intensive care units (ICU) are characterised by their high level of complexity, due to the severity of their patients and the supporting therapies they use. The complexity of care here therefore arises not solely in terms of care for the patient, as it is affected by the impact on the family of a loved one being admitted to an ICU.

In general, hospitalisation in an ICU is associated with high levels of anxiety, stress and depression in family members. This may even last for 3 months after the discharge of the patient.<sup>1</sup> The family members of ICU patients at a high risk of dying have been observed to suffer a high prevalence of feelings of fear, anxiety, depression and sadness.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in a longitudinal study it was found that after one year up to 43% of the family members of patients who had been in an ICU presented high levels of depressive symptoms. In the majority of cases these tend to fall over time, while in 16% of family members they

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