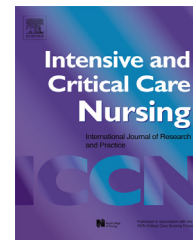




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REVIEW

Patients' transition in the Intensive Care Units: Concept analysis

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KEYWORDS

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Summary

Background: Adequate preparation of critically ill patients throughout their transition experience within and following discharge from the Intensive Care Unit is an important element of the nursing care process during critical illness. However, little is known about nurses' perspectives of, and engagement in, caring for critically ill patients during their transition experiences.

Aim: This paper aims to review the literature about the concept of transition within the context of critically ill patients in the Intensive Care Unit, focusing on Intensive Care Unit nurses.

Review method: CINAHL, MEDLINE, OVID, Science Direct, SAGE eReference and SAGE Journal Online data bases were searched for relevant literature published since 1970.

Results: The critically ill patients' transitions in Intensive Care Units are generally described as a period of transfer or change of situation, or the experience of inner change or role during and after the illness. The critically ill patients' transition experience per se is not directly described, nor is nurses' understanding of it.

Conclusion: Nurses' understanding of critically ill patients' transition may significantly impact the patients' care in the Intensive Care Unit. Thus, research is needed that focuses more on evaluating nurses' understanding of patients' transition and its consequences.

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Implications for Clinical Practice

- Intensive Care Unit nurses' understanding of what transition means is important as the transition experience may significantly impact on the patient, family and health professionals involved in the patients' care.
- Nurses' understanding offers a key to interpreting person-illness-environment interactions in terms of their actual and potential effects on health.
- Conceptualisation of transition and its bio-psychosocial-cultural consequences may assist in providing therapeutic nursing to critically ill patients.
- Understanding of the transition concept may help to improve management of patients in the acute phase of a critical illness and thus may increase their chances of survival but does not guarantee a return to full health.
- Appropriate preparation of patients throughout their health and illness transitions experience is a vital aspect of recovering from critical illness.

Introduction

Transition is a concept that can be described as a process and an outcome. The concept offers a key to interpreting person-illness-environment interactions in terms of their actual and potential effects on health (Chick and Meleis, 1986). Thus, careful conceptualisation of transition and its bio-psychosocial-cultural consequences may assist in providing therapeutic nursing to critically ill patients. Such patients generally require a package of care to support their complex needs while they regain good health (Foust, 2007). Improved management of patients in the acute phase of a critical illness may increase their chances of survival but does not guarantee a return to full health (Hutchison, 2007). Hence, appropriate preparation of patients throughout their health and illness transitions is a vital aspect of recovering from critical illness.

Aim and review method

This paper aims to review the concept of transition within the context of critically ill patients, focusing on Intensive Care Unit nurses.

Various combinations of the terms *transition*, *transition experience*, *transitional care*, *transfer*, *critically ill patients* and *ICU nurses' perception* were entered into CINAHL, MEDLINE, OVID, Science Direct, SAGE eReference and SAGE Journal Online data bases. The key search combination was 'transition and ICU patients' transition and critically ill patients and intensive care transition'. Search limitations included English only publications from 1970 to the present. The search resulted in 3270 articles about intensive care and critically ill patients' transitions. Of these, only 49 related closely to the concept of transition. All are included in this review due to the limited number of publications on the topic.

Results and discussion

Defining the concept of transition

The term 'transition' is derived from the Latin verb 'transire', meaning to go across (Chick and Meleis, 1986). The original meaning is reflected in today's meaning: a 'passage from one state, stage, subject, or a change of place

to another or a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another' (Macquarie English Dictionary, 2006, p. 1303).

In nursing terms, transition can be defined as follows

Transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationship (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5)

A passage from one life phase, condition, or status to another; both the process and the outcome of complex person-environment interaction. It may involve more than one person and is embedded in the context and the situation. Defining characteristics of transition include process, disconnectedness, perception and patterns of response (Chick and Meleis, 1986, p. 239).

Movement or passage between two points and in the transitional process that involves transformation or alteration. The term is also used in relation to a process of inner-reorientation as a person learns to adapt and incorporate new circumstances into life (Kralik et al., 2006, p. 324).

Anthropologist Van Gennep (1960) described the process involved in acquiring a new status as having three phases: separation; transition; and incorporation. Van Gennep's central idea is that each phase signifies a change from one state to another; transition is a kind of no-man's land in which the individual is between social categories and emerges from the transition with a new persona.

Similarly, Schlossberg (1981) developed 'Transition Theory' to create a framework to enable practitioners to understand why people react and adapt so differently to transition; and why the same person can react and adapt differently at different points in life. Schlossberg's (1997) revised theory consists of three components: transition; the transition process; and coping with transition. Thus, to adjust to, or cope with a changing situation, a person who experiences the process of moving into a new place will need to learn the new system's rules, regulations, norms and expectations. When a person is experiencing the process of moving through, they are in survival mode. When they are going through the process of moving out, they may experience feelings of grief, even if they perceive the transition to be positive. Individuals experiencing such feelings may view self-initiative with ambivalence (Evans

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