



Call for Prevention of a Hidden Threat to Patient Safety: The Necessity of Paying Attention to Cognitive Disorders among Intensive Care Unit Nurses

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Dear Editor,

The continuous provision of nursing care in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), given the complex nature of these departments, can have adverse physical and psychological consequences for nurses, threatening their well-being. One of the adverse outcomes that can be emphasized is cognitive disorders. The nature of the work of nurses in the ICU requires a high level of alertness, quick decision-making, and effective communication. Being in this high-stress cycle which demands great precision can adversely affect the mental and cognitive health of nurses, resulting in deterioration and decline [1].

Cognitive disorders are recognized as a significant issue among ICU nurses. Research suggests that high levels of job stress, long shifts, and continuous exposure to emotional situations can lead to cognitive impairment in nurses. The ICU environment, owing to its complexity and critical nature, causes burnout and mental fatigue in nurses, gradually worsening their physical and cognitive functions [2]. According to studies, cognitive disorders result in attention deficits, diminished processing

capacity, and impaired decision-making in nurses. Determining the exact prevalence of this disorder is challenging given the lack of a unified definition of cognitive impairment and the absence of consistent assessments. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that many ICU nurses are exposed to significant cognitive stressors during their work shifts [3].

Several risk factors contribute to the development of cognitive disorders in ICU nurses. Increased workload and a high patient-to-nurse ratio are among the issues that heighten stress levels and cognitive overload. Further, factors such as age, mental health history, and insufficient sleep exacerbate cognitive decline in nurses [4]. Less experienced and novice nurses may be less prepared to manage the challenging environment of the ICU, resulting in intensification of anxiety and cognitive fatigue. Moreover, consecutive night shifts can lead to chronic sleep deprivation for nurses, subsequently affecting their cognitive abilities and caregiving performance in the ICU [5].

The consequences of cognitive disorders in ICU nurses do not only affect the nurses themselves but can also pose a serious threat to patient safety as well as the

quality of nursing care. Cognitive disorders can result in lowered attention to detail in nursing care, increasing the likelihood of medication and management errors. Moreover, the repercussions of cognitive disorders may contribute to a higher prevalence of professional burnout among nurses, destabilizing the workforce and negatively impacting the dynamics of the healthcare team as well as the continuity of care [6].

Given the importance of cognitive disorders in intensive care unit (ICU) nurses and their impact on patient safety, implementing practical programs to mitigate cognitive disorders is essential. Structured work programs that allow for adequate breaks and energy renewal can help mitigate physical and cognitive fatigue [7]. Further, organizations should create a supportive work environment, promote mental health resources, and conduct regular assessments to identify nurses at risk of cognitive decline. Non-pharmacological interventions such as mindfulness exercises, cognitive stimulation activities, and regular psychological support can also boost cognitive resilience among ICU nurses. Further, investing in training related to the recognition and management of cognitive disorders can help make nurses more resilient to the development of cognitive disorders and facilitate the mitigation of these issues [8]. Ultimately, it can be stated that cognitive disorders present a significant challenge in the field of nursing, particularly in the high-pressure environment of the ICU. Implementing targeted interventions can provide the necessary support for nurses as well as enable them to deliver quality and safe care to patients. Healthcare systems should enhance both nurse satisfaction and patient outcomes through establishing an environment that fosters mental resilience.

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