The NICU is an inherently stressful environment. Stress can lead to burnout and negatively affect infant outcomes. Stress resiliency is the way nurses cope with stress and move on in a positive way, allowing increased engagement, improved job satisfaction, and decreased staff turnover.

NICU stressors and resiliency

Purpose and Goal: CNEP # 2086

- Learn about the stressors NICU nurses experience
- Learn about strategies NICU nurses can use to cope with stress

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Requirements for successful completion:

- Successfully complete the post-test
- Complete the evaluation form

Date

- November 2018 – November 2020
Learning Objectives

• Describe the general stressors inherent in the NICU
• Describe the negative effects of stressors in the NICU
• Describe at least 2 strategies for coping with stress

Introduction

• Neonatal nursing is rewarding and challenging
• But the NICU environment is inherently stressful
• It has long been identified as a source of stress
  • That can negatively impact well-being
  • That can negatively impact job satisfaction
• Stressors can eventually outweigh satisfiers
• Coping strategies can help alleviate the stress

Stressors in the NICU Environment

• The NICU is a highly specialized environment
• Work stress can negatively affect well-being
• Chronic work stress can contribute to:
  • Decreased morale
  • Burnout and fatigue
  • Job dissatisfaction
  • Increased turnover
• Stress can also contribute to negative infant outcomes
• Identifying and addressing stressors:
  • Is beneficial to NICU nurses
  • Is beneficial to NICU infants
  • Is beneficial to NICU families
• Identifying NICU stressors is essential
  • So that interventions can be developed
• To decrease NICU stress
• To promote NICU satisfaction
• To increase NICU retention

Significant Stressors for Neonatal Nurses

• There are a range of potential NICU stressors
• These potential stressors can lead to:
  • Physical stress
  • Psychological stress
• General NICU stressors are associated with:
  • Specialized training
  • Specialized education
  • New advancing technologies
  • Dealing with grieving families
  • Dealing with the death of an infant
• NICU nurses need ongoing advanced training and education
  • To keep up with advanced technology
  • To provide optimal care to fragile infants
• Specific NICU stressors are associated with:
  • High-acuity infants
  • Unpredictable events
  • Caring for dying infants
  • Noise and space limitations
  • Single room care designs
    • Which improve developmental outcomes
    • But can be problematic for nurses
      • Limited visibility of infants
      • Increased walking distances
      • Decreased interaction with coworkers
      • Decreased communication with coworkers
• Other stressors for NICU nurses include:
  • Safe staffing levels
  • Mandatory overtime
• According to the American Nurses Association
  • Safe staffing and overtime
• Contribute to significant stress
• Contribute to job dissatisfaction
• Are the top 2 reasons nurses change jobs
• Stressors in the NICU can eventually outweigh satisfiers
  • Leading to decreased engagement
  • Leading to increased job dissatisfaction
  • Leading to increased nursing turnover
• The percentage of nursing turnover in the US
  • Has been estimated as 16.2% overall
  • Hospitals with Magnet nursing status
    • Estimates range from 9 – 12%
  • New nurse turnover within the first year
    • Estimates range from 17.5 – 30%
• Retaining highly trained nurses is crucial
  • Given the time involved in orientation
  • Given the financial investment in nurses
  • Given the financial investment in NICUs
  • Given the negative impact on NICU morale
  • Given the negative impact on NICU infants

**Neonatal Nurse Burnout**

• NICU nurses are exposed to several stressors:
  • Critically ill infants
  • Complex diseases
  • Unpredictable events
  • Constant alarm noise
  • Complex technologies
  • Precise attention to detail
• NICU nurses can experience high levels of stress
  • Physical stress
  • Psychological stress
• Stress can lead to a sense of energy and urgency
• But stress can also lead to increased levels of:
• Low morale
• Absenteeism
• Mental fatigue
• Physical exhaustion
• These 4 symptoms of stress are known as burnout
  • Nurse burnout develops when a nurse:
    • Feels emotionally exhausted
    • No longer finds meaning in work
    • Feels disconnected from coworkers
    • Feels helpless and hopeless at work
    • Feels a decreased sense of accomplishment
• Nurse burnout can result in physical symptoms
  • Headaches
  • Sleeplessness
  • Muscle tension
• Physical symptoms can lead to health problems
  • Hypertension
  • Cardiovascular problems
  • Gastrointestinal problems
  • Decreased immune function
• Nurse burnout can also result in mental symptoms
  • Guilt
  • Anger
  • Shame
  • Depression
• Psychological symptoms can also lead to problems
  • Anxiety
  • Altered appetite
  • Social withdrawal
  • Compulsive behaviors
    • Alcohol
    • Drug use
    • Gambling
• Nurses who do not recognize or cope with burnout
  • Have difficulty expressing empathy
  • Have difficulty providing effective care
• Infant safety is a major concern when burnout occurs
  • Increased risk of errors
  • Decreased family satisfaction
• Solutions to nurse burnout are critical and include:
  • Job satisfaction solutions
    • Recruitment
    • Nurse retention
  • Nurse support solutions
    • Rewards
    • Advocacy
    • Recognition
    • Team spirit
    • Compensation
    • Physician support
  • Decreased fatigue solutions
    • Good scheduling
    • Power nap breaks
    • Decreased call shifts
    • Decreased OT shifts
  • Supportive environment solutions
    • Fun social activities
    • Mentoring programs
    • Continuing education
    • Grief and loss support
    • Ethical issues support
    • Professional development

Satisfiers for Neonatal Nurses
• There are a range of potential NICU satisfiers
• **General NICU satisfiers are associated with:**
  • Confidence in NICU skills
  • Confidence in knowledge base
  • Confidence in making decisions
  • Confidence in infant care abilities
  • Confidence in current standards of care
• Neonatal nurses also experience specific satisfiers
  • Providing quality care under pressure
    • NICU expertise respected by families
    • Ability to meet infants’ physical needs
    • Ability to meet families’ emotional needs
  • Spending time with infants and parents
    • Preparing for discharge
    • Organizing follow up care
  • Spending time with extended families
  • Spending time with coworkers
    • NICU team spirit
      • Especially shift related
      • Between shifts a bonus!
    • Time for coworker support
    • Fun activities outside of work
• Interprofessional relationships are also NICU satisfiers
  • Provider support during emergencies
  • Provider support of nursing judgement
  • Provider respect of NICU skills and abilities
• Post-NICU visits from families are highly satisfying
  • Photos and updates
  • Individual family visits
  • Organized NICU Reunions
  • Any opportunity to see families
Coping Skills and Resiliency for NICU Nurses

- Stress is determined by the way a situation is perceived
- Individual perceptions determine:
  - What is an excessive demand
  - What is a challenging task
  - And what is an opportunity
- Studies have identified 3 thought patterns or habits
  - These habits influence how stress is perceived
  - The first habit is deficiency focusing
    - This is a negative interpretive style
    - The focus is on what is wrong
  - The second habit is skill recognition
    - This can be a negative or positive style
    - The focus is on personal abilities
  - The third habit is necessitating
    - This is a positive interpretive style
    - The focus is on importance and control
    - Desirable and optional
    - Or an inflexible demand
- Despite exposure to stressors in the NICU environment
  - Many nurses manage to cope with the stress
  - Recognizing personal patterns or habits
  - Can support successful resiliency strategies
- There are a range of potential resiliency strategies
  - Overall personal support
    - Peer support at work
    - Peer support away from work
    - Leadership support at work
      - Immediate feedback
      - Increased communication
    - Family support at home
  - Overall specific NICU support
• Problem solving
• Self-controlling
• Positive reinforcement

• Problem-solving and control are the most common
  • Analyzing problems
  • Taking control of infant care
  • Focusing on *important* tasks
  • Increasing personal work efforts
  • Reinforcing peer work efforts

**Summary**

• Stress is inherent in the NICU environment
• Stress resiliency can be simply defined as:
  • How nurses cope with stress
  • How nurses move on in a positive way
    • Despite exposure to stress
    • Despite exposure to adversity
  • How nurses maintain a sense of control
  • How nurses maintain a sense of equilibrium
• NICUs should support nurses in learning resiliency skills
  • Resiliency should be included in orientation
    • For all new employees
    • For all new graduate nurses
  • Peer mentoring programs can offer support
  • Team building activities can foster confidence
  • Leadership can be trained in supportive styles
    • Team building
    • Staff appreciation
    • Communication skills
    • Collaboration skills
  • Simulation opportunities can improve confidence
References


