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Moral distress matters: A strategy to identifying, educating, and managing moral distress for critical care nurses

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Nurses are ranked as one of the most trusted, ethical, and honest professions by public opinion polls, according to the American Nurses Association (ANA). In an increasingly complex health care system, delivery of high quality care to complicated patients by nurses while maintaining this public perception is challenging. Moral distress occurs when one knows the right action to take but feels hindered because of an over-riding authoritative power or institutional policy. One in three nurses report experiencing moral distress. Critical care nurses experience ethical dilemmas and moral distress at higher rates than non-critical care nurses due to the nature and acuity of the patient population they serve. Moral distress has emerged as a significant factor contributing to nurse turnover, burnout, and also impacts patient safety and quality of care outcomes. The purpose of this project in progress is to determine the level of moral distress experienced by direct care critical care nurses at one academic medical center and with implementation of an online continuing education program based on American Association of Critical Care Nurse's 4A's approach, will determine if there is a decrease in moral distress. A prospective observational design will be used wherein baseline and one-month post intervention will be measured by Moral Distress Scale-Revised (MDS-R). This innovative project will systematically address moral distress among critical care nurses and importantly provide a sustainable moral distress program that can be broadly implemented in nurse residency and new staff orientation programs in the future.

Biography

Patrizia L Fitzgerald is in her second year Doctor of Nursing Practice program from The Pennsylvania State University College of Nursing. She is currently the Simulation Lab Coordinator for Penn State Harrisburg and recently achieved national certification as a Simulation in Healthcare Educator. She is also an Instructor of Nursing in Adult Health for Penn State Harrisburg's Accelerated Second Degree Undergraduate program. She has over 25 years of nursing experience in various roles and settings and the last 13 years have been in clinical and education practice.

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