

Intensive Hospice Care Helps Everyone Involved

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Hospice care, as most people think of it, only happens in hospice rooms. But it is just as important to the patient in the intensive care unit struggling to survive. When there is still a glimpse of hope, the medical team will try their best to save it; but when it is irreversible, it is extremely important, albeit not easy, to keep both the dead and the living both at peace.

The reason is that when it comes to the final moments of life, the patients' family needs to be care for as much as the patients do, because they also suffer, physically and mentally, throughout the process, and the



nursing staff are challenged in terms of their emotional well-being and professional readiness. The PGY manuals of my colleagues often inform us that they do not know how to respond when they encounter such a situation, and they may even try and avoid it. This dilemma has become a source of stress for them. That is when we started to think about ways for them to act as angels for the patients and their families in the last stage of their journey, not only to accompany them through the valley, but also to let us as caregivers of the patients and their families feel at ease.

We selected willing and promising colleagues for planned training, and initiated transfer training upon their return to the hospital. Furthermore, through the development of lesson plans, we include the introduction and practice of the “Four Lessons of Life” in our regular on-the-job education and intensive care training. Through systematic teaching and practice of comfort care for terminally ill patients, nurses can become familiar with how to deal with the impermanence of life, so that they can be more tenderhearted and more competent, assist the patients, the patients’ families, and the nurses themselves to be at ease throughout the entire process.

“Through the training in hospice related courses, I know more about what I can do for my patients when they are at the end of their life, instead of just wait,” said Nurse Ya-Ju, a nurse practitioner with four years of clinical experience. “In the past, we used to wait until the last moment before we inform the family to take the patient home. Now, thanks to this training,



ICU teams are also trained in hospice care and can help patients and their families to face the final moments when medical expertise has been exhausted and ineffective.

when the patient's vital signs start to change, we proactively ask the family if they want to spend more time with the patient and inform them what else they can do to help the patient. Many family members told me before they left the ICU that they are grateful that I was there for them as they accompanied the patient in the last moment, so that they could have less regrets. I, on the other hand, also had a great sense of accomplishment, and find this kind of companionship extremely valuable." Head Nurse Pei-Yu also said, "I went to the hospice care training and acquired more knowledge in the field, and in return I gained more confidence. When I returned to the unit and began implementing hospice training, I felt that my colleagues have become more tenderhearted, reminding each other to keep the volume down when a patient is approaching death, and allow the family to spend more time with the patient, or push the Angel Trolley to the patients' bedside at ease their heart. More importantly, through the hospice care manual developed by the unit, the nursing staff have practical tools to teach the family members the preparation they can work on, so that there will be more than just panic and grief; and to accompany them towards the end of life through the Four Lessons of Life and comfort care. The physicians in our unit responded very well to the concept of hospice care, on top of that the improved communication help increased the quality of our terminal care, I think this is great."

Although we cannot control the length of life, we can work on the quality of it. Intensive hospice care offers precisely that, giving every patient an opportunity to leave with dignity, and the family and medical staff can live without regrets.

Angel Trolley: A mobile prayer platform in the ICU that modeled after the hospice ward. According to different patients' beliefs, different pictures (Buddha, Christ, and etc.) are placed on the trolley. It is pushed to the foot end of the bed, so that the patients can see them and receive spiritual comfort.