



Stress Among Parents of Ventilated Children

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Abstract

Caring for a child who requires mechanical ventilation can be an incredibly challenging and stressful experience for parents. The emotional and physical toll of managing a child's critical medical condition can have profound effects on parents' well-being. Here are some common stressors that parents of ventilated children may experience. Pediatric nurses need to be empowered not only to handle the challenges of ventilated children more importantly about dealing with the challenges related to parental anxiety due to their child's hospitalization. A calm, compassionate and logical approach of a pediatric nurse would allay many anxieties of parents and will enhance their co-operation with the treatment modalities. This approach will promote quality nursing care and patient safety.

Keywords: Ventilator; Parental Anxiety; Stress; Children

Introduction

Hospitalization of a child is a challenging and emotionally charged experience that takes a toll on parents, often leading to heightened levels of stress. This essay explores the multifaceted aspects of parental stress during a child's hospitalization, shedding light on the various factors that contribute to this phenomenon. To support parents of ventilated children, healthcare providers should prioritize open and empathetic communication, provide mental health resources, offer support groups, and involve parents in the decision-making process whenever possible. Social workers and psychologists can play a crucial role in providing emotional support and connecting families with relevant resources.

The pediatric ward is an environment with a high level of stress for most parents. In the hospital, family members tend to depersonalize themselves as they need to conform to the rules set by the hospital institution [1-7].

During the 1st days of hospitalization, parents experience the highest levels of stress, but in the following days, they feel a reduction of it [8].

Stress, anxiety, fears, and worries, caused by the hospitalization of children, accompany not only parents, but the whole family. Communicating to the parents that their children have to be hos-

pitalized is a state of alarm and worry because parents think that something bad is going on with their children [9]. Parents of hospitalized children experience stress from different stressors such as hospital visits, waiting for the diagnosis, stressed by the hospital environment, and children's teeth grinding nature at night. There are other factors which do not influence parental stress including residence, divorced parents, and hospital conditions. The findings obtained by this study showed that more professional help and psychosocial support should be provided to parents of hospitalized children, whereas doctors need to closely collaborate with parents because this will help them know better about their patients [1].

Hospitalized child and parental stress Concern for the child's health

The primary source of stress for parents of hospitalized children is the grave concern for their child's health. The emotional weight of witnessing a child in pain and uncertainty about the outcome of the medical condition can be overwhelming.

Disruption of daily routine

The hospitalization of a child disrupts the normal family routine. Parents must navigate the complexities of balancing their presence at the hospital with managing other responsibilities, such as work and caring for other children at home.



Figure

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=%2f0uKaY5H&id=23D8C3DB38E86BFB658CFC20D11DE46C123B2978&thid=OIP>

Emotional strain

The emotional strain on parents is immense. Seeing a child undergo medical procedures, dealing with the fear of the unknown, and grappling with the sense of helplessness can lead to emotional exhaustion and stress.

Communication challenges

Understanding complex medical information and treatment plans adds an extra layer of stress. Miscommunication or a lack of clear information from healthcare providers can leave parents feeling confused and anxious.

Financial burden

The financial implications of a child's hospitalization create an additional source of stress. Medical expenses, travel costs, and potential loss of income can lead to financial strain, compounding the challenges parents face.

Lack of control

Parents often feel a loss of control in medical situations. Entrusting the health and well-being of their child to healthcare professionals can be difficult, especially when decisions are made beyond their influence.

Limited Sleep and Self-Care

The constant monitoring of a child's condition can lead to sleep deprivation for parents. Neglecting self-care during this time is common, contributing to physical and mental exhaustion.

Support system

The presence and effectiveness of a support system play a crucial role in managing parental stress. Lack of emotional and practical support from family, friends, or hospital staff can exacerbate stress levels.

- **Emotional distress:** Seeing a child on a ventilator can be emotionally overwhelming for parents. They may grapple with feelings of fear, guilt, helplessness, and sadness.
- **Uncertainty:** The unpredictable nature of a child's medical condition and the uncertainty surrounding their prognosis can create high levels of stress for parents. Not knowing what the future holds can be particularly challenging.
- **Communication challenges:** Understanding and processing complex medical information can be difficult for parents. Effective communication between healthcare professionals and parents is crucial to alleviate stress and ensure parents are well-informed about their child's condition and treatment.
- **Financial strain:** The cost of medical care, especially for a child requiring ventilation, can be significant. Parents may face financial challenges, including medical bills, travel expenses, and potential loss of income if they need to take time off work.
- **Social isolation:** Caring for a ventilated child often requires significant time in hospitals or at home, limiting parents' ability to engage in social activities. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and a lack of support.
- **Decision-making burden:** Parents may be faced with difficult decisions regarding their child's care, including choices about treatment options, end-of-life decisions, and long-term care planning. This decision-making burden can be emotionally draining.

- **Impact on family dynamics:** The stress of caring for a ventilated child can strain relationships within the family. Siblings may feel neglected, and the overall family dynamic may be disrupted.

Management of parental stress among ventilated children

Caring for a ventilated child can be an emotionally and physically demanding experience for parents. Here are some suggestions to help manage parental stress in the context of ventilated children:

- **Educate and Communicate:** Ensure that parents have a clear understanding of the ventilator and its functions. Provide regular updates on the child's condition and treatment plan. Encourage parents to ask questions and express their concerns to healthcare professionals.
- **Support Groups:** Connect parents with support groups or counseling services where they can share experiences with others facing similar challenges. Hearing from parents who have been through similar situations can provide valuable insights and emotional support.
- **Family-Centered Care:** Promote family-centered care, involving parents in decision-making and care planning. Encourage parents to actively participate in their child's care, such as learning about ventilator settings and basic troubleshooting.
- **Self-Care:** Emphasize the importance of self-care for parents. Encourage breaks, rest, and taking care of their own physical and emotional well-being. Provide a comfortable space within the hospital environment where parents can relax and recharge.
- **Respite Care:** Offer respite care options, allowing parents to take short breaks while ensuring the child's care is managed by trained healthcare professionals. This can help prevent burnout and enable parents to return to caregiving with renewed energy.

Open communication channels

- Maintain open and honest communication between healthcare providers and parents.
- Foster a collaborative approach where parents feel comfortable expressing their needs and concerns.

Counseling services

Offer access to counseling services for parents to address the emotional challenges associated with having a ventilated child. Mental health professionals can provide coping strategies and support tailored to the specific situation.

Educational resources

Provide educational materials or workshops to help parents understand the medical aspects of their child's condition. Having a deeper understanding can empower parents and reduce feelings of helplessness.

Create a comforting environment

Ensure that the child's room is welcoming and comfortable for parents, with amenities that facilitate extended stays. Offer emotional support through hospital staff trained in providing comfort and understanding.

Coordinate with social services

Connect parents with social services to address financial concerns and provide assistance with practical matters. Reducing external stressors can contribute to a more supportive environment for parents.

Conclusion

It's essential for healthcare professionals to recognize and address the holistic needs of parents, considering both their physical and emotional well-being, to ensure they can provide the best possible care for their ventilated children. We need to remember, the goal is to create a holistic and supportive care environment that not only focuses on the child's medical needs but also recognizes and addresses the emotional and practical needs of parents caring for a ventilated child. Each family is unique, so tailoring support to individual circumstances is essential.

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