

Impact of an ICU Bereavement Program on Perceived Family Support

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Background: The ICU did not have a timely, ongoing and consistent process to support the families of patients who died in the ICU. Recognizing the benefit of providing comfort to families, a team of nurses developed a sustainable ICU bereavement program. The Ginkgo tree was adopted as the theme for the bereavement program. The Ginkgo Biloba leaf is considered a symbol of longevity, hope, resilience, strength and peace.

Purpose: The goal of the bereavement program is to improve the quality and duration of the support provided to the family after the death of a loved one in a critical care unit. We also wanted to create a sustainable and consistent process for grieving support.

Methods: The Bereavement program offers 12 months of support to families with five points of contact initiated at time of death through the first year anniversary of the death of a loved one. Upon expiration, RN gives family a handmade Ginkgo Leaf sympathy card with embedded wildflower seeds and completes an intake form to include family contact information. In two weeks an addition sympathy card signed by staff is mailed. Follow up phone calls are made 4-6 weeks after death to ask how the family is doing and offer further support that may be needed. A bereavement packet is offered with additional resource material. An additional card with a brief hand written message is sent by a bereavement committee member at six months and twelve months after death. Phone calls and comments will be tracked. Intake forms will also be compared to ICU census tracking of deaths in unit, to ensure all families are contacted.

Results: The following data will be collected: Number of patient deaths in the ICU, Number of families successfully contacted by phone or mail at each point of contact, and total number of resource referrals made. Comments by family members will be included in the tracking tool as well.

Conclusion: With a consistent bereavement program in place, we hope to provide a sustainable bereavement program to honor the families of those we cared for. Only preliminary data is currently available.