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Patient's Experiences of Intensive Care Following Cardiac Surgery

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Background: Cardiac surgery is an operation for repairing structural defects of the heart. It is a unique, fearful, traumatic and unpleasant experience for patients. An intensive care is needed for patients immediately after the cardiac surgery. Staying in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is a significant, incomprehensible experience for them and it can vary from patient to patient.

Aim: The aim of the study is to explore the patient's experiences regarding intensive care following a cardiac surgery.

Design: This phenomenological study was conducted with 20 patients who were given intensive care for at least four days following cardiac surgery at National Hospital of Sri Lanka. The data collection was done through semi-structured interviews of patients after transferred from ICU to cardiothoracic ward.

Results: Three major themes were emerged from the data such as discomfort faced by the patients, emotional aspects of the patients and their impression on ICU surroundings. The patients faced discomfort due to pain intolerance, insufficient sleep, difficulty in maintaining body postures and thirst. The emotional aspects faced include the satisfaction with care given, renewal of hopes after successful surgery, feeling like a stranger and uncertainty of survival. The availability of modern technology, lightings of the ICU and noise disturbances was highlighted under the theme of their impression on ICU surroundings.

Conclusion: It was concluded that, discomforts of body, emotional aspects and environmental factors that experienced by the patients in the intensive care following cardiac surgery make their stay in ICU an unpleasant one. All these experiences collectively influence the quality of life in patients who have undergone cardiac surgeries. Hence, it is recommended to educate the patients about the ICU experiences in advance.

Keywords: Cardiac surgery, patient experiences, intensive care