

ABSTRACT

Background: Nurses play a key role in providing care for dying patients in the intensive care unit (ICU). The physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual intimate care given by Kurdish nurses allows them to develop a therapeutic relationship with dying patients in the ICU.

Aims: The present study sought to explore the meaning of caring for dying patients from the perspective of Kurdish ICU nurses in Kurdistan region/Iraq.

Method: The data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 10 nurses working in Rezgary and Hawler Teaching Hospitals (Erbil, Iraq) in adult ICUs. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed through a qualitative design based on the Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological design approach.

Results: Four major themes including emotional exhaustion, continuous development, optimistic rather than futile care, and working within constraints emerged.

Conclusion: Kurdish nurses in their caring encounters with dying patients experienced a range of feelings from emotional strain to being optimistic while working within limited resources in the ICU. Further research is needed to explore the experiences of nurses with other cultures of caring with dying patients in ICUs.

Relevance to practice: End of life care in ICU is emotionally challenging therefore nurses in this setting require psychological and spiritual support to ensure optimal care provision.

Key words: Critical care nursing, ICU follow-up, Intensive care, Dying patients, Phenomenological research, Qualitative research.