

VISN-3 Communication Skills Laboratory:
Training Program for ICU Nurses

Case Studies
For Role Playing Exercises

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Case Study #1
Faculty Demonstration Role Play

Mrs B. is a 68 yo woman with severe COPD who developed pneumonia requiring mechanical ventilation for 3 weeks. Weaning was difficult but she has now been off the ventilator for 2 days. The ICU attending plans to transfer her out of the ICU to the ward. The nurse informs the physician that the patient's daughter is refusing this transfer. The doctor and nurse meet with the daughter.

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Case Study #2
Dealing With Strong Emotions

Mr. T. is an 87 year old Caucasian man who was admitted to the ICU 12 days ago after surgery for a perforated duodenal ulcer. Within 48 hours of surgery, he developed ARDS and remains ventilator dependent. His surgical wound is not healing well. In the last several days, his creatinine has been rising and urine output falling. The surgeon visits daily before 7 AM but has not spoken directly to the family since PO Day 0, when he reported that the surgery went well. The admitting intensivist (now off service) spoke briefly to the family – the patient’s wife of 60 years, and his adult son - on Day 2 of the ICU stay about the status at that time. A nephrologist who saw the patient yesterday told the wife that he had been consulted to provide dialysis. At today’s ICU rounds, the current ICU attending predicted that the patient would die in the hospital, but this was not discussed with the family.

The wife has asked several times for reassurance that her husband will ultimately be able to return home with her. The son, who often accompanies his mother during visiting hours, seems angry with the physicians caring for his father. An ICU family meeting attended by the ICU attending physician, the patient’s designated “continuity of care” nurse, the wife and the son, is held to discuss goals of care. The family has been insisting that “everything” be done.

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Case Study #3
Dealing With Conflict

Mr. F. is a 57 yo man who had a subarachnoid hemorrhage due to a cerebral aneurysm; he underwent surgical clipping 3 days ago. The neurosurgeon was satisfied with the result and assured the spouse on the day of surgery that her husband would soon be neurologically intact. He was slowly regaining consciousness and opened his eyes by the third post-operative day. On PO Day 4, however, he developed vasospasm and lost consciousness. The patient's wife is angry. She thinks that all the doctors lied about her husband's condition and that they continue to conceal the truth. She is convinced that her husband's deterioration is due to improper care. The nurse informs the physician of the wife's position, noting that the wife is threatening litigation. The physician and nurse then meet with the wife.