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An ICU patient room designed for caring

Healthcare environment in intensive care units (ICUs) is proved to have physiological effects and the ability to facilitate health and wellbeing as well as worsen the already critical ill patients' status. The work environment for critical care nurses is reported unhealthy and research has implicated high risk for developing burnout due to occupational matters. The technological progress has evolved enormously during the last decades, but the design of the ICU has not developed in the same pace. Evidence-based design (EBD) is a concept integrating knowledge from various research disciplines and its application to healing environments.

The aim was to explore nursing staff's experiences of working in an evidence-based designed ICU patient room.

A patient room was renovated and furnished, according to the principles of EBD. The room was equipped with acoustic panels in the walls and ceiling and a cyclic light system was installed. In addition prototype pendulums were installed, equipped with lights, electrical sockets and medical gas supplies. The room had a window and door leading onto a patio with furniture and plants, which were accessible to patients and their relatives. Interviews with eight critical care nurses and five assistant nurses were conducted and analysed by qualitative content analysis.

The result of the study showed that an evidence-based designed ICU patient room stimulated alertness and promoted wellbeing among the participants, cultivated their caring activities. The prototype design of the medical and technical equipment challenged their nursing actions.

The room had been refurbished in order to create a healing environment. This study found that the new environment had a great impact on the participants' wellbeing and caring behavior and the need for flexibility in patient rooms. At a time when sick leave is increasing and turnover in nurses is high, these findings showed the importance of design of ICUs.