

NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS

Team leadership in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU)



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Teamwork refers to the way in which team members function and coordinate to produce 'synchronised' output. Patient safety research has demonstrated that poor teamwork is a causal factor underlying critical incidents in the intensive care unit (ICU). Due to this, a growing amount of research has been conducted within the ICU in order to identify the specific components of teamwork that influence patient outcomes. Consequently, the main aim of this research project was to investigate aspects of teamwork and team leadership in the intensive care unit. The primary focus was on the leadership behaviours used by consultants to manage complex multidisciplinary teams during normal and crisis operations.

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Team leadership in critical care medicine.

This project aimed to identify the behaviours senior physicians (e.g., specialists, staff attending) use to lead multidisciplinary teams in the intensive care unit. The study design consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews focusing on team leadership, crisis management, and the development of an environment that enables effective team performance in the intensive care unit.

The research was performed in seven general intensive care units based in Scotland; senior intensive care medicine physicians (n = 25) were interviewed. Responses to the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and subjected to "content" analysis. The analysis focused on references to the "functional" behaviours (e.g. planning, decision-making, delegating tasks) used by leaders to manage team performance and the "team development behaviours" (e.g. development of team culture) used to build the conditions that enable effective team performance. Inter-rater reliability was acceptable for the interview analysis.

A list of over 900 leadership behaviours was compiled. These behaviours were grouped together in a theoretically driven framework of intensive care unit team leadership. This framework captures the core behaviours necessary for effective team leadership in the ICU, and the principles may be extended to beyond critical care medicine. In terms of impact, the study is being used as the basis for a program of research developing team leadership training and assessment tools in critical care medicine

Publications

Reader, T., Flin, R., Mearns, K., & Cuthbertson, B.H. (2009). Developing a team performance framework for the intensive care unit. *Critical Care Medicine*, 37, 1787 – 1793. http://journals.lww.com/ccmjjournal/Abstract/2009/05000/Developing_a_team_performance_framework_for_the.35.aspx

Reader, T., Flin, R. & Cuthbertson, B. (2011). Team leadership in the Intensive Care Unit. *Critical Care Medicine*, 39, 1683-1691. http://journals.lww.com/ccmjjournal/Abstract/2011/07000/Team_leadership_in_the_intensive_care_unit_The.12.aspx