

# The Effect of Virtual Counseling Services Regarding Burnout Amongst NICU Nurses

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## Background

According to a recent journal article, burnout has been recognized as a leading cause of increased turnover rates with a total of 14% of nurses leaving their job within a 1-year period (Thomas et al., 2022). The American Nurses Association released information analyzing burnout challenges in relation to productivity and stability of healthcare organizations each year (Thomas et al., 2022). “Creating a supportive working environment, such as biweekly virtual counseling services, in the midst of stressful situations may prove helpful to nurses experiencing burnout” (Thomas et al., 2022). Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) nurses experience a vast amount of stress daily related to intensive patient monitoring, heightened emotional and physical demands, and the need for prompt flexibility when making sound critical nursing decisions (Thomas et al., 2022).

## PICOT Question

In nurses within the neonatal intensive care unit, what is the effect of bi-weekly virtual counseling services on burnout compared with current practices within a 3-month period?

## Literature Search

### Database:

- CINAHL Complete
- PubMed
- Ovid Emcare
- Nursing Reference Center Plus

### Key Terms:

- NICU stress
- NICU burnout
- Counseling services AND nursing
- Mental health AND nursing
- Nursing AND therapy AND burnout

### Article Selection Criteria:

- Published between 2012 and 2022 (Within 5 years)
- Published in English
- Peer-Reviewed Article or Journal



## Synthesis of Findings

- Nurse professionals are experiencing heightened burnout from inadequate work-life balances evidenced by increased encounters with patient death, emotional trauma, and becoming second victims of recurrent events within the healthcare setting (Connors et al., 2020; Squellati & Zangaro, 2022).
- Fatigue was reported as one of the most highly experienced symptoms of burnout in neonatal intensive care unit nurses (Fortney, et al., 2020; Lary, et al., 2019).
- Stress management programs including elements like monthly reflection check-ins, team away days, and staff sessions on managing difficult conversations showed a reduction of absences due to stress-related illness in multiple studies (D’Urso et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2022).



Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health. (2021, January 2). *NICU Journey* [Photograph]. Advice from a NICU Nurse. <https://www.lancastergeneralhealth.org/health-hub-home/motherhood/fourth-trimester/advice-from-a-nicu-nurse>

## Decision to Change

- The rationale for wanting to change current practice stems from the increasing prevalence and underlying reality of nurse burnout amongst NICU nurses.
- Further resources, interventions, and services, such as virtual counseling, should be readily available for nurses to access within their chosen place of work. Providing the above-mentioned service could potentially serve as a prophylaxis measure versus a treatment measure.
- Educating nurses of available services is proactive in nature; we, as healthcare professionals, should advocate for our professional community and avoid prolonging interventions until nurses are expressing burnout symptoms of extreme fatigue, emotional and mental exhaustion, and heightened anxiety.
- The interventions were based on several stress management programs that comprised several elements including monthly reflective practice groups, staff drop-in sessions, and teachings on managing difficult conversations amongst colleagues.
- The interventions will change practice by offering resources on how to manage a demanding situation at the workplace. The evidence supports the efficacy of this intervention, because there is a significant difference in levels of burn-out following the intervention.

## Evaluation

- By the end of the three-month implementation period, the implementation of bi-weekly virtual counseling services will decrease the rate of burnout amongst NICU nurses by 10%.
- This outcome will be determined by the Stress Response Inventory research tool, which examines emotions and perceived stressed in difficult situations, given to neonatal intensive care unit nurses (Thomas, et al., 2022).

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