

Quality Improvement Project: A Touch of Gentleness in Critical Care - Hand Massages for Critically Ill Patients in ITU

Aim

To implement a structured hand massage program in the ITU that reduces patient-reported stress and anxiety levels, better sleep, promote hand mobility and control of pain

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically reshaped critical care practices worldwide. In Intensive Treatment Unit (ITU), the pandemic highlighted not only the importance of advanced medical interventions but also the critical need for holistic patient care. There's a growing recognition of the psychological toll on critically ill patients, particularly due to isolation, reduced physical contact, and the stress of critical illness. This project aims to address these challenges by introducing hand massages as a complementary therapy to support critically ill patients This is to address Pain, Comforting Agitation and Delirium, Complimentary therapy to hand immobility and Promoting better sleep hygiene.



Benifits of Hand Massage in ITU Settings

Pain Relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distraction Mechanism• Improves circulation and release of endorphines as natural pain killers
Stress Reduction and Relaxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stimmulation of parasympathetic Nervous System• Lowers cortisol levels
Help manage delirium confusion, PTSD and overall wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• nonverbal connection and reduce loneliness• Humanizing care• Help in sensory phase for Dementia
Aid to prevent immobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nerve function stimulation• Reduce neuropathy symptoms
Improve Sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Release of Oxytocin• Promote relaxation to aid in sleep

Discussion

- March 2023 - Senior Critical Care Sister Carmen Diaz attended a community based hand Massage training from "A Touch of Gentlenes"
- Recognising the difficulties brought by the COVID Pandemic the project was bourne for ESHT ITU patients
- Training of ten volunteer ITU Nurses to start the program
- Provided a nightly 10 minute offering of Hand Massages for consenting ITU patients.
- Main target population of recovering and long term ITU patients. Risk assessments also carried out for appropriateness
- Able to provide more than 300 hand massages for ITU patients and staff
- Positive feedback from patients - "Felt they are human"
- Able to support managing Pain, Agitation, Delirium, Immobility and Sleep Promotion
- Project is low cost, sustainable and provides positive patient experience

Conclusion

This quality improvement project represents a significant step in adapting our care practices to provide more holistic, touch-based interventions while maintaining the highest standards of safety and infection control. Further studies of key benifits is reccomended to monitor changes to support evidenced based practice.



Bringing Health Professionals Together & Rebuilding Patient's Trust

Sounds Like This:

" Providing hand massages in Critical Care is a moment of quiet connection where we can build trust and provide comfort to our sickest and most vulnerable patients". ICU nurse

"I believe the Critical Care hand massage has greatly improved patients' well-being in a number of ways. It has helped reduce their anxiety, improve sleep, alleviate pain and stiffness; and most of all brought patients comfort. Providing hand massages help me humanize patients and recognise the emotional aspect of the healing process" **ICU Nurse**

" Giving a hand massage to patients in critical care is an incredibly meaningful and soothing experience, both for the patient and the member of staff. It does not only provide a moment of calm amidst the chaos, but it also offers a sense of human connection that helps reduce anxiety and fear and helps the patient feel care and valued " **ICU nurse**

"This is so relaxing. This is the best I have ever felt. This is a high-tech hospital" ICU patient

"Patient lightly sedated but restless...After the massage he was calmed and settled...no need for increased sedation" **ICU nurse**

"This patient was so relaxed eyes shut, respiratory rate down, heart rate down. He thanked me and said it was really really nice. He slept well that night and said he felt so much more rested. We were able to talk during the massage (his wish) about his health . He thanked me as well for the time to chat" **ICU nurse**

"I so love the difference hand massages with A Touch of Gentleness makes to our patients. Its made my job so much more rewarding and It has helped me connect more also with my colleagues who benefit from it too." **ICU nurse**

"This lady fell asleep whilst I was doing massage and continued to sleep for hours. In the morning she said it was wonderful, she trusted me, felt comfortable and said it was an amazing service".

" Makes you feel like you are a human being and it helps you to your recovery. I think it helps the nurses relax and draws them nearer to the patients" **ICU patient**

" Thank you so much for your lovely massages . I swear these hand massages are the things that have helped my hands get better quicker"- a patient with spinal injury and problems with hand strength and coordination.

" A valuable skill that is good for the patient, that was amazing, I felt the stress fall off me" **ICU Patient**

Real Stories – Real Impact

from the ICU nurses and patients at the Conquest Hospital, Hastings

Hello Carmen,
I just wanted to let you and Helen know how much I've valued giving patients hand massages recently.

So I'm so grateful to be involved. Tonight I gave two hand massages. One Gentleman jumped at the offer of a massage, he relaxed, heart rate went down, pain disappeared. The frown from his brow softened and he was asleep. I was over whelmed, it was because I actually felt I had done something worthwhile and of value. Nursing can become routine, mechanical, automatic but this really touched me and for the first time in a while I remembered some of the core reasons I wanted to be a nurse.

The second massage was lovely too. The patient, a young man who had serious neurological problems said that he felt that all the sensation and movement he was regaining in his hands recently was directly because of the massages. He couldn't thank us enough. It was great to let him talk, and make time to listen to him . That was another treat. Something we have less and less time to do.

Thank you.
Best wishes

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Real Stories – Real Impact

Nurse Sophie, after implementing A Touch of
Gentleness, shared:

"Tonight, I gave two hand massages. One gentleman relaxed instantly—his heart rate dropped, his pain eased, and he fell asleep. For the first time in a while, I remembered why I became a nurse. Another young patient with neurological issues credited his regained hand sensation to these massages. The gratitude was overwhelming."

The Invitation: Bringing This to Your Institution

We invite hospitals and care homes to partner with us in integrating A Touch of Gentleness into staff training. Our program provides:

- ✓ Practical, hands-on training in gentle hand massage techniques.
- ✓ Evidence-based insights on the benefits of touch in healthcare.
- ✓ Guidance on creating a culture of connection in clinical settings.

By embracing this initiative, you are not just improving patient care—you are revolutionizing the healthcare experience with compassion at its core.



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