The ICU Patient Room: The views and meanings as experienced by the next-of-kin

Sepideh Olausson, doctoral student, RNCCN, MNSc, University of Borås
Berit Lindahl, RN, RNT, RNCCN, DMSc, University of Borås
Marharetha Ekebergh, RN, RNT, Professor, University of Borås

BACKGROUND
Intensive care unit, ICU, is considered to be one the most complicated area for care of critically ill patients. The rooms in ICU are small and narrow and the high tech environment believes to affect patients and next-of-kin wellbeing. Previous research reveals that a large number of patients suffer from unreal experiences, often very traumatic during their stay in ICU. Unpleasant memories and risk of developing post traumatic stress after discharge from ICU is rather common. In this context next-of-kin play an important and crucial role for supporting the patient though the process of illness and recovery. Next-of-kin in ICU are considered to be a lifeline for patients. Furthermore, the design and interiors of ICU affect the interplay between the patient and the next-of-kin.

AIM
The aim of this study as a part of a larger project was to describe and interpret the meanings of the ICU patient room as experienced by patients’ next-of-kin.

METHOD
Data were collected through qualitative research interviews in combination with photographs. The next of kin were invited to photograph various aspects of the room that they associated with a feeling. The data were analyzed by using phenomenological hermeneutical method.

RESULT AND CONCLUSION
Three major themes were emerged; Indwelling the room and time, Becoming at home and Extension of the room. The comprehensive understanding is that the room perceives as a lived as an extended place and space. The room is experienced and felt as an unbounded space- it stretches itself out. This means that the lived ICU patient room is not merely ICU patient room as defined by health care providers. In addition, it is extended to where next-of-kin spend time, move and interact with others. The room is also a place where the string to the loved one tightens. The ICU patient room is constituted of people dwelling there, events and interiors. Experiences of the ICU patient room as lived involves two dimensions namely the subjective and the objective at the same time. The design and the interiors of the ICU room affect the next-of-kin’s mode of being. It can either amplify feelings of being homeless or it can embrace and help them to become at-home-ness. The ICU room is also a shared and inhabited place. There is an ambiguity in how the subjective and the invisible are experienced which depends on how you are being received and welcomed into the room.

Keywords: The ICU patient room, Design and interior, Next-of-kin, Experiences