



Developing a Research and Education Agenda to Improve End-of-Life Care in ICUs

A December 1998 workshop engages 43 experts

SUMMARY

Researchers from the University of Washington organized and convened a workshop to:

- Develop a research agenda for improving end-of-life care in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).
- Create educational content for presentations at professional society meetings about end-of-life care in ICUs.

The project was part of *Promoting Excellence in End-of-Life Care*, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

The Project

Some 43 experts in the fields of critical care medicine, palliative medicine, medical ethics and the legal aspects of medicine attended the December 1998 workshop in Scottsdale, Ariz. Several of these experts also contributed chapters to *The Transition from Cure to Comfort: Managing Death in the Intensive Care Unit* (see the National Program Office Bibliography in the *Promoting Excellence in End-of-Life Care Program Results Report*).

Key Recommendations

In an article published in *Critical Care Medicine* (Rubenfeld and Curtis, 2001) (see the Bibliography, Project Sites in the [Program Results Report](#)), and in a report to RWJF, workshop participants determined that a research agenda for end-of-life care in ICUs should:

- Define the problem by:
 - Clarifying the state of knowledge about current practice.
 - Identifying communication challenges for patients, families and staff.
 - Developing outcome measures.

- Describing cultural differences regarding approaches to end-of-life among intensive care unit clinicians.
- Identify solutions by:
 - Ascertaining whether teaching clinicians about best practices improves care.
 - Understanding the public's expectations about outcomes of critical care.
 - Developing innovative strategies for educating clinicians.
 - Exploring the value of structural changes, such as providing palliative care consultations in ICUs.
- Evaluate solutions by exploring novel study designs to examine quality of care, family satisfaction, effective communication and other issues.
- Overcome barriers to researching end-of-life care in ICUs, which include:
 - The multidisciplinary nature of work in intensive care units.
 - Securing access to critically ill patients and informed consents for study.
 - Securing funding for research.

The national program office created the Critical Care Workgroup to build on the Arizona workshop, which ultimately published "Quality Indicators for End-of-life Care in the Intensive Care Unit" in *Critical Care* (Clarke, 2003).

See the Project Sites Bibliography in the *Promoting Excellence in End-of-Life Care Program Results Report*.

Funding

RWJF made a grant of \$107,906 from the program's Special Opportunities Fund for the workshop.

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