

**BRIDGING THE GAP:  
INCREASING CRITICAL CARE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN PACU NURSE RESIDENTS**

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**Background Information:** A recent development of a Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) Nurse Residency Program (NRP) at a large teaching institution placed new graduate Nurse Residents (NR) in the PACU. The extent of NR Critical Care (CC) experience is limited to the time spent during nursing school clinical rotations, and observational CC shifts during the NRP. As a result, PACU stakeholders voiced concerns regarding NR lack of CC knowledge and skills. The PACU is a rapidly evolving unit that not only cares for post-surgical patients, but as also Intensive Care Unit (ICU) patients who necessitate hemodynamic monitoring, ventilator management, and vasoactive medication titration on a daily basis.

**Objectives of the Program:** The goal was to create a program that increases CC knowledge and skills for PACU NR.

**Process of Implementation:** A needs assessment revealed a need for further CC education for PACU NR. Recommendations by professional organizations denote that CC patients in the PACU must receive the same level of care as in ICU. This ideology was used to guide the Critical Care in the PACU Program, which implemented didactic and High-Fidelity Simulation (HFS). The program addressed CC fundamentals including arterial blood gas interpretation, mechanical ventilation management, hemodynamics and vasoactive medication titration. The NR were divided into two groups, a Non-Simulation Group (NSG) and Simulation Group (SG) to compare which group would have greater improvements in knowledge. After didactic lecture, the SG participated in a HFS activity to apply didactic instruction.

**Statement of Successful Practice:** A knowledge assessment was given pre-lecture, and post-lecture to both groups and post-simulation to the SG. The NSG showed an increase in knowledge from 34-65%. The SG exhibited a knowledge improvement from 43% to 83%. The group that utilized the HFS showed greater improvement in knowledge and the ability to care for CC patients.

**Implication for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing:** The NRP needs more than observational ICU hours; NRs need the opportunity to focus on CC tenets and then apply them to patient care. Using didactic lessons and then applying the concepts with HFS gives NR the ability to apply critical concepts and improve ICU patient outcomes in the PACU.