A Scoping Review of Nursing Practices and Strategies to Support Patients and Families in Acute Care Settings During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Authors

Sonja J. Meiers[1], Véronique de Goumoëns[2], Lorraine Thirsk[3], Petra Brysiewicz[4], Sandra Eggenberger[5], Blanche Kiszio[2], Natalie McAndrew[6], Sandra Richardson[7].

1. College of Nursing and Health Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI, USA

2. La Source School of Nursing, HES-SO, University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, Av. Vinet 30, Lausanne & Bureau d'échange des savoirs pour des pratiques exemplaires de soins BEST a JBI Center of Excellence

3. Faculty of Health Disciplines, Athabasca University, Alberta, Canada

4. School of Nursing & Public Health, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

5. Minnesota State University Mankato, Mankato, MN, USA

6. College of Nursing, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

7. School of Health Sciences, Kura Mātai Hauora, College of Education, Health and Human Development, Te Rangai Ako Me Te Hauora, University of Canterbury, Canterbury District, New Zealand

Abstract

Objective: The aim of this scoping review is to identify and describe nursing practices and strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the impact of forced separation between patients in acute care and their families. This study is based on a systemic approach considering the patient and the family as a unit of care.

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic changed family visitation models in acute care settings and led to separation of patients and their loved ones.

Inclusion criteria: Participants are patients of any age receiving hospital based acute care and their families. Concepts are nursing practices and strategies to overcome patient-family separation in body, space, time, and relation during COVID-19. Context is acute care focused on treating illness or injury; performing diagnostic, surgical or therapeutic procedures; reducing severity of illness, injury, or symptoms; or managing obstetrical labour and delivery.

Methods: The scoping review will be conducted in accordance with the JBI methodology for scoping reviews. Key information sources to be searched include Medline (Ovid), CINAHL Complete (EBSCO), APA Psycinfo (Ovid), Embase (Elsevier) and the Cochrane COVID-19 study register databases between March 2022 and July 2022. Studies included were in the English language. Data will be extracted from papers included in the scoping review by two or more independent reviewers using a data extraction tool developed by the reviewers. Data will be collated, analyzed and presented graphically, in diagrammatic or tabular form and summarized in narrative form describing how the results relate to the reviews objective.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic changed family visitation models in acute care settings (*hospital-based, emergency units, Intensive Care Unit-ICU)* and led to separation of patients and their loved ones. At the start of the pandemic, very restrictive social isolation policies meant families were excluded from the hospital and were unable to be physically present with their acutely ill loved one. This gradually improved, however some forms of restriction still remain and fluctuate according to resurgence of pandemic waves. In addition, patients, families, and nurses experienced these separations while managing all the uncertainties presented by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, contagion risk, and treatments to manage its effects.

Nurses play an important role in managing this separation by uniting patients and families via technology, making calls to update and reassure worried family members, and by stepping into the family role to support patients at end of life when families cannot be present. The objective of this review is to identify and describe nursing practices and strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the impact of forced separation between patients in acute care and their families.

A preliminary search of MEDLINE, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews and *JBI Evidence Synthesis* was conducted and no current or underway systematic reviews or scoping reviews on this specific research question were identified. Nevertheless, existing reviews were identified that have examined the impact of visitor restrictions on families during the pandemic. Moss et al. (2021) explored visitor restriction impact on patients, their families and the healthcare team; they identified consequences on coping and daily function and on mental health outcomes. Their review highlighted the necessity to increase support and coping, connection and communication, and awareness of the well-being. They also reported 87 different approaches to mitigate the impact of visitor's restriction targeting families, patients and healthcare professionals, such as telehealth and videoconferencing platforms, palliative care, communication about difficult news over the phone, plans to preserve continuity of care, triage system, mental health hotline for professionals were proposed. This differs from the aim of the present scoping review, which is to identify and describe the nursing practices and strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic, to mitigate the impact of forced separation between patients in acute care and their families. This study is based on a systemic approach, which considers the patient and the family as a unit of care and requires a focus on the individual level, the unit level, and the organizational level.

Review question

1. What nursing practices and strategies did nurses use to support patients in acute care and their families during COVID-19 pandemic related separation?
    a. Individual level
    b. Unit level (including interprofessional collaboration)
    c. Organizational level
2. What are the differences between the settings (pediatrics-mental health-acute)?

Keywords

Family care; family health; isolation; family nursing interventions; physical distancing

Inclusion criteria

Participants

The study aims relate to "**patients in acute care and their families**", which raises the issue of definition around these concepts. The concept of acute care is specified under the context definition/clarification. The definition of patient and families is defined with the following.

Patients, for the purpose of the study, are individuals of any age (that is children and adults) who are admitted in-patients receiving hospital-based acute care.

Families are defined in line with the Wright and Leahey (2013) classic definition of "Family is who they say they are" (Shajani & Snell, 2019). This allows for a broad collection of relational terms, encompassing varied forms of relationship, including but not limited to blood relation, relation by marriage, designated significant other/friend/support/caregiver, and any other configuration or combination.

Studies will be excluded if the focus is on patient and families out of the hospital inpatient as well as if they focused only on the patient.

Concept

The concept for this scoping review refers to all type of **nursing practices and strategies** including any type of practice action, support, strategies, approaches, directions to overcome separation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the nursing contribution within interdisciplinary practices and strategies. Exclusion criteria will be for studies where the nursing contribution to practice or strategy development cannot be determined.

Based on several different sources (Britannica Dictionary, s. d.; Meiers et al., 2020; Meiers & Tomlinson, 2003; merriam webster, s. d.; Montauk & Kuhl, 2020; Van Manen, 2016), the definition of the concept of "**Separation" is as follows:** an experience or state of a patient and family being moved apart with a gap/difference(s) in body, space, time, and relation that may include physical space, emotional space, psychological separation or relational separation.

Context

For the purposes of this review, acute care is defined as health services delivered in a facility that focuses on treating illness or injury; performing diagnostic, surgical or therapeutic procedures; reducing severity of illness, injury, or symptoms; or managing obstetrical labour and delivery (OECD /OCDE, 2002).

Acute care is characterized by instability, uncertainty, complexity, and variability in management of patient care (Huber et al., 2021). Acute care is typically short-term and requires care or monitoring by a multidisciplinary healthcare team 24/7 (CIHI, 2016).

Following these definitions, studies will be included if they take place in hospital/acute care facility; maternity including pre- and post-partum; mental health and psychiatry acute care; emergency departments; medical and surgical inpatient including all specialties; critical care units; palliative care if it is an acute admission to a facility for short-term treatment. Studies taking place in home-based hospital care, sub-acute or rehabilitation facilities, skilled nursing facility, long-term acute care, alternate level of care, long-term or residential care or aged care facility, long-term rehabilitation, outpatient treatment or services (e.g., dialysis, cancer treatment where the patient is not admitted to a facility overnight), birthing homes and hospices will be excluded.

Types of sources

This scoping review will consider both experimental and quasi-experimental study designs including randomized controlled trials, non-randomized controlled trials, before and after studies and interrupted time-series studies. In addition, analytical observational studies including prospective and retrospective cohort studies, case-control studies and analytical cross-sectional studies will be considered for inclusion. This review will also consider descriptive observational study designs including case series, individual case reports and descriptive cross-sectional studies for inclusion.

Qualitative studies will also be considered that focus on qualitative data including, but not limited to, designs such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, qualitative description, action research and feminist research.

In addition, systematic reviews that meet the inclusion criteria will also be considered, depending on the research question.

Text and opinion papers will also be considered for inclusion in this scoping review. Grey literature will be considered (thesis, etc.).

Methods

The proposed scoping review will be conducted in accordance with the JBI methodology for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2021)

Search strategy

The search strategy will aim to locate both published and unpublished studies between March 2022 and July 2022. A three-step search strategy will be utilized in this review. First an initial limited search of MEDLINE (Ovid) will be undertaken to identify articles on the topic. The following MESH terms will be used: *Family, Caregivers, Family health, Family care, Social isolation, Patient isolation, Physical distancing, Loneliness, Quarantine, Visitors of patients, COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, Coronavirus infections, Pandemics*. Second, the text words contained in the titles and abstracts of relevant articles, and the index terms used to describe the articles were used to develop a full search strategy for Medline (Ovid), CINAHL Complete (EBSCO), APA Psycinfo (Ovid), Embase (Elsevier) and the Cochrane COVID-19 study register *(see Appendix 1)*. The search strategy, including all identified keywords and index terms, will be adapted for each included database and/or information source. The search for unpublished studies will include Dissertations and Theses (ProQuest), Grey Literature Report. Third, the reference list of all included sources of evidence will be screened for additional studies.

Studies published in English from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic will be included.

Study/Source of evidence selection

Following the search, all identified citations will be collated and uploaded into the Covidence software for organizing systematic reviews and duplicates removed. Following a pilot test, titles and abstracts will then be screened by two or more independent reviewers for assessment against the inclusion criteria for the review. Potentially relevant sources will be retrieved in full, and their citation details imported into the Covidence software. The full text of selected citations will be assessed in detail against the inclusion criteria by two or more independent reviewers. Reasons for exclusion of sources of evidence at full text that do not meet the inclusion criteria will be recorded and reported in the scoping review. Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers at each stage of the selection process will be resolved through discussion, or with an additional reviewer/s. The results of the search and the study inclusion process will be reported in full in the final scoping review and presented in a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses extension for scoping review (PRISMA-ScR) flow diagram (Moher et al., 2009).

Data extraction

Data will be extracted from papers included in the scoping review by two or more independent reviewers using a data extraction tool developed by the reviewers (*see Appendix 2*). Data extracted will include specific details about purpose, design, context, population, sample size, intervention/ action/ strategy, measure, duration of Intervention, provider, outcomes and key findings relevant to the review question/s.

The draft data extraction tool (Appendix 2) will be modified and revised as necessary during the process of extracting data from each included evidence source. Modifications will be detailed in the scoping review. Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers will be resolved through discussion, or with an additional reviewer/s. If appropriate, authors of papers will be contacted to request missing or additional data, where required.

Data analysis and presentation

Data will be collated, analyzed and presented graphically, in diagrammatic form, in a map or in tabular form. A narrative summary will accompany the tabulated and/or charted results and will describe how the results relate to the review's objective and questions.

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Declarations

We declare that we have been intentional to consider nuances of language and cultural interpretations from the perspective of authors from six different countries on three continents.

Author contributions

Designing the analysis (SJM, VdG, LT, PB, SE, NA, SR); collecting the data (BK), writing the protocol (SJM, VdG, LT, PB, SE, NA, SR).

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest in this project. We have no conflict of interest or any personal, financial, professional, or intellectual bias for any of the authors listed on the protocol to report.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Search strategy

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Databases Search strategies

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What nursing practices and strategies did nurses use to support acute care patients and their families during COVID-19 related separation?

Participants – Individual patients of any age (including pediatric and adult) who are admitted in-patients receiving hospital based acute care and their families.

Concepts - Nursing practices and strategies, including any type of practice action, support, strategy, approach, or direction to overcome separation, as well as the nursing contribution within interdisciplinary practices to overcome patient-family separation in body, space, time, and relation during COVID-19.

Context - Acute care focused on treating illness or injury; performing diagnostic, surgical or therapeutic procedures; reducing severity of illness, injury, or symptoms; or managing obstetrical labour and delivery in the COVID-19 pandemic.

	P - Participants	C - Concept	C - Concept	C - Concept	Co - Context	Co - Context
Keyword	Family Families Caregivers Carer Careprovider Caretaker Relatives Couple Couples Spouse Kinship Relatives "Next of kin"	Intervention* OR program* OR "nurse led" OR support* OR training OR counsel* OR "skill-building" OR "peer group" OR "peer groups" OR psychoeducation OR education OR oriented OR centered OR centred OR "discussion group" OR "discussion groups" OR "support group" OR "support groups" OR workshop*	Separation Isolation Lockdown restriction "Restrictive measure*" Loneliness Lonely "Social distancing" Regulations Policies	Visit*	Covid COVID-19 SARS-Cov-2 Pandemics coronavirus	Hospitalisation Hospitalized Hospitalised Acute care Critical care Inpatients Hospital units "Perioperative care" "preoperative care" "subacute care" ICU maternity unit psychiatric unit

Mesh	Family/ Caregivers/ Family health/ Family care/	Nursing process/ OR counseling/ OR exp Psychotherapy, Group/ OR Self-Help Groups/ OR Peer Group/ OR Health Education/ OR Social Support/ OR Nursing care/ OR Specialties, Nursing/ OR Nurses/ OR Nurse's Role/ OR Nursing/ OR Patient-Centered Care/)	Social isolation/ Patient Isolation/ Physical Distancing/ Loneliness/ Quarantine/	Visitors to patients/	COVID-19/ SARS-CoV-2/ coronavirus infections/ Pandemics/	Hospitalization/ adolescent, hospitalized/ child, hospitalized/ inpatients/ patient care/ critical care/ perioperative care/ preoperative care/ subacute care/ Hospital Units/ hospitals, maternity/ or hospitals, psychiatric/ exp maternal health services/ exp psychiatry/ hospitals/ exp hospitals, special

Ovid Medline

Ovid MEDLINE(R) and Epub Ahead of Print, In-Process, In-Data-Review & Other Non-Indexed Citations, Daily and Versions 1946 to July 05, 2022

(exp Patient isolation/ or exp Social isolation/ or exp Loneliness/ or Physical distancing/ or Quarantine/ or exp Visitors to Patients/ or (isolation or separation or lockdown or restriction* or restricted or "restrictive measure*" or loneliness or lonely or "social distancing" or "physical distancing" or quarantine or visit*).ti,ab.)

AND

 (Nursing process/ OR exp nursing care/ OR exp Specialties, Nursing/ OR exp Nurses/ OR Nurse's Role/ OR exp nursing/ OR counseling/ OR exp Psychotherapy, Group/ OR Self-Help Groups/ OR Peer Group/ OR Health Education/ OR exp Social Support/ OR Patient-Centered Care/ OR ((family OR families OR caregiver* OR carer* OR careprovider* OR caretaker* OR relatives OR couple OR couples OR spous* OR kinship OR "next of kin") ADJ4 (Intervention* OR program* OR "nurse led" OR support* OR training OR counsel* OR "skill-building" OR "peer group" OR "peer groups" OR psychoeducation OR education OR oriented OR centered OR centred OR "discussion group" OR "discussion groups" OR "support group" OR "support groups" OR workshop* OR "social support" or "emotional support" or "family support")).ab,ti. OR ((family OR families OR caregiver* OR carer* OR careprovider* OR caretaker* OR relatives OR couple OR couples OR spous* OR kinship OR "next of kin").ti. AND (Intervention* OR program* OR "nurse led" OR support* OR training OR counsel* OR "skill-building" OR psychoeducation OR education* OR oriented OR centered OR centred OR group* OR workshop* OR "social support" or "emotional support" or "family support").ti.))

AND

(exp Family/ OR exp Caregivers/ OR exp Family health/ OR Family care/ OR (family OR families OR caregiver* OR carer* OR careprovider* OR caretaker* OR relatives OR couple OR couples OR spous* OR kinship).ti,ab)

AND

(exp COVID-19/ OR exp Sars-Cov-2/ OR exp coronavirus infections/ OR exp pandemics/ OR (covid OR COVID-19 OR sars-cov-2 OR coronavirus OR pandemics).ti,ab)

AND

(Hospitalization/ OR adolescent, hospitalized/ OR child, hospitalized/ OR inpatients/ OR patient care/ or critical care/ or perioperative care/ or preoperative care/ or subacute care/ OR exp Hospital Units/ OR Critical Illness/ OR hospitals, maternity/ OR hospitals, psychiatric/ OR exp maternal health services/ OR exp psychiatry/OR hospitals/ OR exp hospitals, special/ OR (hospitalization OR hospitalized OR hospitalised OR inpatient* OR "patient care" OR "critical care" OR "acute care" OR "Perioperative care" OR "preoperative care" OR "subacute care" OR ICU OR ITU OR "intensive care").ti,ab)

Limit: English, French

Results 180 (11.7.2022)
Search history :
https://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?T=JS&NEWS=N&PAGE=main&SHAREDSEARCHID=3LzgLa1lW07lRs1arFjPTRRrYJiywpatvJK7cDxHnhN6C3QLJrCPucTZNF1xNluGH

CINAHL Complete EBSCO

((MH "Visitors to Patients") OR (MH "Quarantine") OR (MH "Social Isolation") OR (MH "Loneliness") OR (MH "Social Distancing") OR (MH "Stay-at-Home Orders") OR (MH "Hospital Policies") OR (lockdown*) OR (restriction*) OR (restrictive))
AND
((MH "Family+") OR (MH "Extended Family") OR (MH "Family Health") OR (MH "Family Separation") OR (MH "Family Centered Care") OR (MH "Family Nursing") OR (MH "Critical Care Family Needs Inventory") OR (MH "Spouses") OR (MH "Parents") OR (MH "Patient-Family Relations") OR (MH "Family Attitudes") OR (MH "Parent-Child Relations") OR (MH "Parental Attitudes"))
AND
((MH "COVID-19") OR (MH "Coronavirus Infections") OR (MH "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome") OR (MH "Disease Outbreaks") OR (MH "COVID-19 Pandemic") OR (COVID-19) OR (SARS-COV-2))
AND
 ((MH "Hospitalization") OR (MH "Adolescent, Hospitalized") OR (MH "Aged, Hospitalized") OR (MH "Bariatric Patients") OR (MH "Burn Patients") OR (MH "Cardiac Patients") OR (MH "Child, Hospitalized") OR (MH "Comatose Patients") OR (MH "Critically Ill Patients") OR (MH "Infant, Hospitalized") OR (MH "Inpatients") OR (MH "Obstetric Patients") OR (MH "Stroke Patients") OR (MH "Surgical Patients") OR (MH "Ventilator Patients") OR (MH "Critical Care") OR (MH "Patient Care") OR (MH "Acute Care") OR (MH "After Care") OR (MH "Cardiovascular Care") OR (MH "Child Care") OR (MH "Emergency Care") OR (MH "Gastroenterology Care") OR (MH "Pediatric Care") OR (MH "Perioperative Care") OR (MH "Subacute Care") OR (MH "Tracheostomy Care") OR (MH "Critical Care Nursing") OR (MH "Burn Nursing") OR (MH "Coronary Care Nursing") OR (MH "Pediatric Critical Care Nursing") OR (MH "Respiratory Nursing") OR (MH "Intravenous Nursing") OR (MH "Nephrology Nursing") OR (MH "Perianesthesia Nursing") OR (MH "Perioperative Nursing") OR (MH "Urologic Nursing") OR (MH "Hospital Units") OR (MH "Burn Units") OR (MH "Intensive Care Units") OR (MH "Intensive Care Units, Pediatric") OR (MH "Intensive Care Units, Neonatal") OR (MH "Nursing Units") OR (MH "Pediatric Units") OR (MH "Critical illness") OR (MH "Critically Ill Patients") OR (MH "Psychiatric Units") OR (MH "Psychiatric Service") OR (MH "Midwifery Service") OR (MH "Nurse-Midwifery Service") OR (MH "Nursing Service") OR (MH "Obstetric Service") OR (MH "Obstetric Patients") OR (MH "Psychiatric Patients") OR (ICU) OR (ITU) OR ("critical care") OR ("acute care") OR ("intensive care"))

147 results (11.7.2022)
https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?profile=ehost&defaultdb=ccm (copy paste search strategy into database)

APA PsycInfo 1806 to June Week 4 2022

(quarantine/ or social isolation/ or loneliness/ or physical distancing/ or lockdown.mp. or restriction.mp. or restrictive.mp. or Institution Visitation/ or visit*.mp.)
AND
(coronavirus/ or COVID-19/ or Pandemics/ or disease outbreaks/ or sars-cov-2.mp.)
AND
(family/ or extended family/ or family members/ or family relations/ or couples/ or parents/ or spouses/ or family separation/ or parental attitudes/ or Parent Child Relations/)
AND
(Hospitalization/ or hospitalized patients/ or hospitals/ or hospital programs/ or exp intensive care/ or exp psychiatric hospitals/ or psychiatric hospitalization/ or health care services/ or exp mental health services/ or exp prenatal care/ or obstetrics/ or critical care.mp. or acute care.mp. or ICU.mp.)

Search history:
https://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?T=JS&NEWS=N&PAGE=main&SHAREDSEARCHID=6MR DFLcyquUHGWGNqdZL80SbnlHlYEKJaA5kmxZev3Ev8tblQC0wCi8aDjuMSR4L8
Results : 26 (11.7.2022)

Cochrane COVID-19 study register
https://covid-19.cochrane.org/?pn=1 (copy paste search strategy into database)
(restrict* or lockdown or isolation or loneliness or distancing or quarantine or visit*) and ("acute care" or "critical care" or ICU or hospital* or psychiatry or maternity) and (Famil* or Caregiver* OR spouses OR couples OR parents OR "next of kin") and (nursing or nurs*)
Results : 318 (11.7.2022)

Embase

('patient visitor'/exp OR 'patient isolation'/exp OR 'social isolation'/exp OR 'loneliness'/de OR 'social distancing'/de OR 'quarantine'/exp OR 'lockdown'/exp OR 'stay-at-home order'/de OR 'hospital policy'/de OR 'restriction*':ab,ti OR 'restrictive':ab,ti OR visit*:ab,ti)
AND
('coronavirus disease 2019'/exp OR 'pandemic'/exp OR 'SARS coronavirus'/exp)
AND
('family'/de OR 'extended family'/de OR 'family health'/de OR 'family relation'/exp OR 'family separation'/exp OR 'family interaction'/de OR 'caregiver'/exp 'family centered care'/de OR 'family nursing'/de OR 'Critical Care Family Needs Inventory'/de OR 'spouse'/exp OR 'parent'/de OR 'family attitude'/exp OR 'child parent relation'/exp)
AND
('hospitalization'/de OR 'hospital patient'/exp OR 'hospital admission'/de OR 'acutely ill patient'/de OR 'burn patient'/de OR 'cancer patient'/de OR 'cardiac patient'/de OR 'comatose patient'/de OR 'critically ill patient'/de OR 'diabetic patient'/de OR 'epileptic patient'/de OR 'hemodialysis patient'/de OR 'high risk patient'/de OR 'hypertensive patient'/de OR 'pediatric patient'/de OR 'stroke patient'/de OR 'surgical patient'/de OR 'ventilated patient'/de OR 'intensive care'/exp OR 'intensive care unit'/exp OR 'subacute care'/exp OR 'intensive care nursing'/exp OR 'anesthesia nursing'/de OR 'burn nursing'/de OR 'cardiovascular nursing'/de OR 'emergency nursing'/de OR 'gastroenterology nursing'/de OR 'intravenous nursing'/de OR 'perioperative nursing'/de OR 'postanesthesia nursing'/de OR 'respiratory nursing'/de OR 'surgical nursing'/de OR 'urologic nursing'/de OR 'aftercare'/de OR 'surgery'/exp OR 'coronary care unit'/exp OR 'burn unit'/de OR 'intensive care unit'/de OR 'medical intensive care unit'/de OR 'neonatal intensive care unit'/de OR 'pediatric intensive care unit'/de OR 'stroke unit'/de OR 'surgical intensive care unit'/exp OR 'pediatrics'/de OR 'medical care'/de OR 'critical illness'/de OR 'critically ill patient'/de OR 'psychiatric department'/exp OR 'mental hospital'/exp OR 'mental health service'/de OR 'mental patient'/de OR 'obstetrics'/exp OR 'perinatal care'/exp OR 'maternity ward'/exp OR 'obstetric patient'/de OR 'ICU':ab,ti OR 'critical care':ab,ti)
Results 186 (11.7.2022)

www.embase.com (copy paste search strategy into database)

Appendix II: Data extraction instrument (proposed)

Title Authors Year of Publication Country	Aims/ Purpose	Design	Context	Population Sample size	Nursing practice / Nursing strategies	Duration of Intervention	Provider	Outcomes	Key findings