A nurse-led, preventive, psychological intervention to reduce PTSD symptom severity in critically ill patients: the POPPII feasibility study and cluster RCT

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Many patients experience severe stress, including hallucinations and delusions, in critical care units. This stress is linked to the development of longer-term psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Little is done to help prevent these problems because there is limited evidence for what works. Previously, a preventive psychological intervention was developed by this research team, to be led by nurses, to address this problem. The intervention had three elements:

1. create a therapeutic environment in critical care
2. provide three stress support sessions for patients identified as acutely stressed
3. provide a relaxation and recovery programme for patients identified as acutely stressed.

In this study [Psychological Outcomes following a nurse-led Preventative Psychological Intervention for critically ill patients (POPPI)], an education package was created to ensure that the intervention could be delivered across several units. A study was then conducted in which two units tested delivering the intervention and patients and staff were asked if it was acceptable. In another study, trial procedures were tested. The information was used to improve all the parts for a clinical trial to find out if the intervention was effective. In the trial, staff at 12 units were trained to deliver the intervention (group 1). At another 12 units, staff were not trained (group 2). A total of 1458 patients took part. How patients in each group felt 6 months later was compared. It was found that the intervention did not reduce development of PTSD symptom severity and it was very uncertain if the intervention was cost-effective.

In its current form, the research team do not recommend that the psychological intervention is brought into the NHS.
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This report

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