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The role of 
New Zealand intensive care nurses 
in ventilation management

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of 
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Abstract

**Introduction:** Previous research about the role of nurses in ventilation management suggests that it is a largely collaborative endeavour between doctors and nurses. These studies, however, are based on the views of nurse managers representing staff as a collective, rather than individual nurses answering from their perspective. Further, previous research only begins to account for the role of automation in ventilation management.

**Aim:** This study describes the role of the New Zealand intensive care nurse in ventilation management and the use of automated ventilator modes.

**Method:** A self-reported online survey using a non-probability sample of intensive care nurses who are members of the New Zealand College of Critical Care Nurses was used (n=204). Data were analysed using quantitative methods to describe and compare with international data.

**Results:** The sample (n=204) had a range of intensive care unit (ICU) experience (0-42 years) and 136 (69.7%) had completed a post-graduate critical care specialty qualification. Participants worked in various sized units (2-26 beds). Nurse to patient ratios were 1:1 for intubated patients. Ventilation management protocols were available for 136 (66.7%) participants; however, the effect of protocol availability on clinical practice was insignificant. Nurses in this study had lower perceived autonomy (p=0.0006) and more perceived influence (p=0.028) in decision-making than their managers reported previously. Consistent with previous research, nurses collaborate with medical staff in fundamental decisions and largely act independently in titrating ventilator settings. New Zealand ICUs have high nurse to patient ratios compared to their European counterparts. While New Zealand ICU nurses have similar reported levels of independent decision-making in oxygen and PEEP titration, they have less independence in adjusting the six other ventilator settings. As in Europe, the most common automated ventilation modes used in New Zealand ICUs are ASV™ and SmartCare™.

**Discussion:** As automated modes independently titrate ventilator settings, the ventilator itself increasingly participates in a role largely identified as the nurses’ domain. The study concludes that it is timely for nurses to re-evaluate their role in ventilation management. Rather than focus on the titration of
ventilator settings, nurses could strengthen their contribution in the collaboration of fundamental decisions.
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The role of New Zealand intensive care nurses in ventilation management

Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................................. v
List of Figures ...................................................................................................................................................... ix
List of Tables ....................................................................................................................................................... x

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study .............................................................................................................. 1
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................... 1
  Ventilation management and the nurses' role ................................................................................................. 3
  Automatic ventilation modes ......................................................................................................................... 5
  The research question .................................................................................................................................. 7
  Key terms ......................................................................................................................................................... 7
  Overview of the thesis .................................................................................................................................. 11

Chapter 2 Literature Review .......................................................................................................................... 13
  Introduction ....................................................................................................................................................... 13
  Search strategy ................................................................................................................................................. 13
  Practice in New Zealand ............................................................................................................................ 14
  Role of the nurse ........................................................................................................................................... 17
  Clinical knowledge of nurses ...................................................................................................................... 17
  Weaning ......................................................................................................................................................... 19
  Work of breathing ......................................................................................................................................... 20
  Knowing the patient ....................................................................................................................................... 21
  Ventilation protocol usage ........................................................................................................................... 22
  Interdisciplinary perspectives in Norway .................................................................................................... 26
  Automated modes ......................................................................................................................................... 27
Summary .......................................................................................................................... 28

Chapter 3 Research Design .......................................................................................... 30
  Introduction .................................................................................................................... 30
  Methodology .................................................................................................................. 30
  Design ............................................................................................................................. 33
  Survey tool ...................................................................................................................... 35
  Method ............................................................................................................................ 37
    Sample population ........................................................................................................ 37
  Ethics ............................................................................................................................... 38
  Data analysis .................................................................................................................. 39
    Descriptive statistics .................................................................................................... 41
    Mean, median and mode .............................................................................................. 41
    Inferential statistics ..................................................................................................... 42
    T-test .............................................................................................................................. 43
    Chi-square test ............................................................................................................ 44
    Correlations ................................................................................................................ 44
    Wilcoxon signed ranks ............................................................................................... 44
  Statistical methods ........................................................................................................ 45
  Data quality ................................................................................................................... 45
  Summary ......................................................................................................................... 46

Chapter 4 Analysis of findings ....................................................................................... 47
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 47
  Description of sample .................................................................................................... 47
    Response rate ................................................................................................................ 47
    Role in ICU .................................................................................................................... 47
    Nursing qualifications .................................................................................................. 48
    Length of time as an ICU nurse .................................................................................. 49
    Hours worked .............................................................................................................. 49
    Size of ICU ................................................................................................................... 50
    Staffing ratios ............................................................................................................. 51
    Guidelines, policies and protocols ............................................................................. 51
    Ventilation education available to nurses .................................................................... 52
    Fundamental decisions ............................................................................................... 52
Independent titration adjustments made by nurses........................................54
Use of automated modes..................................................................................55
Nursing autonomy and influence.....................................................................56
Comparative analysis .......................................................................................58
Autonomy and independence ..........................................................................58
Unit size and independent titrations...............................................................60
Experience and independent titrations...........................................................61
Unit size/experience and autonomy/influence................................................62
Post-graduate ICU qualification ......................................................................62
Education and independent titrations..............................................................63
Protocol usage.................................................................................................64
Protocol and independent titrations...............................................................64
Unit size and experience .................................................................................65
Unit size and fundamental decision-making..................................................65
Experience and decision-making ....................................................................65
Comparison with previous studies.................................................................66
Nurse-to-patient ratios .....................................................................................67
Use of protocols...............................................................................................67
Post graduate nursing study ..........................................................................68
Responsibility of fundamental decisions.........................................................68
Independent titrations.......................................................................................70
Automated modes............................................................................................70
Autonomy and Influence..................................................................................72
Summary...........................................................................................................72

Chapter 5 Discussion.......................................................................................74
Introduction........................................................................................................74
Comparing the sample.....................................................................................75
Clinical experience............................................................................................75
Size of unit........................................................................................................75
Protocols............................................................................................................76
Expertise and nurses’ experience.....................................................................76
Education..........................................................................................................77
Automated modes............................................................................................78
Ventilation prescriptions ................................................................. 79
Fundamental decisions in ventilation management ..................................... 79
Perceived autonomy and influence in fundamental decisions ...................... 80
Automated modes and fundamental decisions ............................................. 81
Titration of ventilator settings ................................................................ 82
Perceived autonomy and influence in titration of settings ........................... 82
Extent of delegation and titrations .............................................................. 83
Balancing autonomy with collaboration ...................................................... 84
Quality of the research ............................................................................ 84
Limitations of this study .......................................................................... 86
Summary ............................................................................................... 87

Chapter 6 Conclusion ............................................................................. 88
Introduction ............................................................................................ 88
Literature ................................................................................................ 88
Implications and key findings ................................................................. 89
Further research ..................................................................................... 91
Conclusion .............................................................................................. 92

References ............................................................................................. 93
Appendix A: Permission from MUHEC ...................................................... 105
Appendix B: Permission to use survey tool ................................................ 106
Appendix C: Information letter ................................................................. 107
Appendix D: Survey ................................................................................ 108
List of Figures

Figure 1: Years worked in ICU .................................................. 49
Figure 2: Hours worked each week in ICU ...................................... 50
Figure 3: Responsibility for fundamental decisions* ................................ 53
Figure 4: Nursing autonomy .......................................................... 56
Figure 5: Nursing influence .............................................................. 57
List of Tables

Table 1: Sentinel studies the thesis draws on .................................................. 15
Table 2: Role in ICU ....................................................................................... 48
Table 3: Qualification ...................................................................................... 48
Table 4: Size of unit ......................................................................................... 51
Table 5: Independent titrations ....................................................................... 54
Table 6: Availability of automated modes and independent titrations .......... 55
Table 7: Independent titrations of %MV adjustment ..................................... 56
Table 8: Perceived autonomy and independent titrations .............................. 59
Table 9: Perceived influence and independent titrations ................................ 59
Table 10: Unit size and independent titrations ............................................... 60
Table 11: Experience and independent titrations ........................................... 61
Table 12: Autonomy and unit size and experience ......................................... 62
Table 13: Influence and unit size and experience ........................................... 62
Table 14: Postgraduate ICU qualification ....................................................... 63
Table 15: PG ICU qualification and independent titrations ............................ 63
Table 16: Protocol in workplace .................................................................... 64
Table 17: Presence of a protocol and independent titrations .......................... 64
Table 18: Size of unit and experience ............................................................. 65
Table 19: Unit size and decision-making model ............................................ 65
Table 20: Nurses’ experience and decision-making model ............................. 66
Table 21: Postgraduate ICU qualification completed ...................................... 68
Table 22: International decisional responsibility ............................................ 69
Table 23: Independent titrations in NZ and Europe ........................................ 71
Table 24: Autonomy and influence ............................................................... 72