

Doctors usually empathetic in pediatric ICU care conferences

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(HealthDay)—Physicians frequently respond with empathy during

pediatric intensive care unit care conferences, though their responses are often buried within other data or missed, according to a study published online July 6 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Tessie W. October, M.D., M.P.H., from the George Washington University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C., and colleagues conducted a single-center phenomenology study in which 68 transcripts of audio-recorded care conferences were analyzed. A total of 30 physicians and 179 [family](#) members of 68 children participated in the conferences. Physician empathetic [statements](#) and families' responses to these statements were coded using qualitative thematic analysis. Empathetic statements were coded as unburied (statement followed by a pause, which allows family to respond) or buried (empathetic statement encased in medical talk or terminated with a closed-ended statement).

The researchers found that 74 percent of the time, physicians recognized families' emotional cues, making 364 empathetic statements. Overall, 61.5 percent of these statements were unburied, while 38.5 percent were buried; buried statements were most commonly followed by medical talk (95 percent). There was a correlation for unburied empathetic statements with alliance responses from the family (71.4 percent of the time, compared with 12.1 percent of the time with buried statements). Twenty-six percent of the time, physicians missed an opportunity to address emotion; at least one missed opportunity occurred in 78 percent of conferences.

"When physicians use transparent, unburied empathetic statements to respond to family emotion, it leads to a deeper conversation and can reveal a family's fears, values, and motivations," the authors write.

One author disclosed financial ties to Vital Talk.

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