**HOW NURSE UNIT MANAGERS SUPPORT THE WELLBEING OF NURSES IN THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT**

**Introduction:** Recruiting and retaining a skilled intensive care unit (ICU) workforce is a major challenge in a time when intensive care admissions are increasing worldwide. The high intensity environment, heavy workloads and shift work take their toll on individual nurse wellbeing. Nurse Unit Managers (NUMs) play a vital role in promoting and supporting the wellbeing of ICU nurses. However, there is limited research that has previously explored how NUMs support ICU nurses.

**Objectives:** The aim of this study was to explore how NUMs perceive and experience their role in supporting the wellbeing of nurses in Australian intensive care unit settings.

**Methods:** A qualitative, multiple case study method was used to meet the study aims. Eligibility criteria included NUMs with at least one year experience in an Australian ICU. Twelve NUMs participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** NUMs understand the importance of supporting nurse wellbeing; however, they face many barriers and challenges to successfully fulfilling this role. Creating trusting relationships, understanding nurses, creating safe, supportive and meaningful environments and supporting personal growth, were seen as a critical elements to succeed. However, NUMs did not feel professionally prepared to support nurses’ wellbeing, and felt unsure about what this part of their role involved and how to prioritise it. Consequently, support was provided sporadically and inconsistently. Support from upper management was also considered important, yet many NUMs claimed they did not receive adequate support which impacted their ability to support ICU nurses’ wellbeing.

**Conclusion(s):**

This study provides important insights for nurse leaders and health administrators into the barriers and facilitators NUMs face when supporting the wellbeing of nurses in ICU. Importantly, findings indicate that NUMs need more support in order to in turn support the wellbeing of nurses in their unit.