ICU nurses’ perceptions of potential constraints and anticipated support to practice defibrillation: A qualitative study

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Introduction
While earlier work in the UK has demonstrated that in-hospital survival rates of cardiac arrest can be improved by nurse performed defibrillation, nurse-led defibrillation is not currently practised in Hong Kong hospitals. Nurse-led defibrillation is believed to improve the survival rate of patients with sudden cardiac arrest, enhance nurses’ role, and advance nursing practice.

Objectives
The study examines the experience of intensive care nurses in caring for patients in cardiac arrest, and their perceptions of introducing nurse-led defibrillation.

Methodology
This was a descriptive, exploratory and qualitative study at an intensive care unit (ICU) of an acute regional hospital in Hong Kong. Twelve registered nurses were purposefully selected for interview.

Result
Although all the participants were trained in basic life support, only 50% were trained in advanced cardiac life support (ACLS), and those trained in ACLS described having limited opportunities to apply their defibrillation knowledge. Whilst participants believed that they were theoretically prepared to influence the patient’s resuscitation outcomes, newly qualified nurses were reluctant to be accountable for defibrillation. In contrast, experienced nurses were more willing to perform nurse-led defibrillation. Support from management, cooperation between nurses and doctors, regular in-hospital ‘real-drill’ programmes, sponsorship for training, and the use of alternative defibrillation equipment should be considered to encourage nurse-led defibrillation in ICU settings. Conclusion: Nurse-led defibrillation is an approach of delivering prompt care to critically ill patients, and a way ahead for intensive care nursing in Hong Kong. Emphasis on a consistent policy to promote nurse-led defibrillation practice is needed.