
Spouses of ICU Patients at Increased Risk of Cardiac Events



According to new research published in the journal *Circulation*, having a spouse in a hospital's ICU may make a person more likely to have a heart attack or a cardiac event/cardiac-related hospitalisation within a few weeks of their partner's ICU admission.

It is important for spouses of ICU patients to pay attention to their own health, especially in terms of cardiovascular disease, advise study authors. Intensive care units have a stressful environment and sometimes, spouses may face tough decisions related to life-sustaining treatment. This can put significant psychological stress on family members and may increase their risk for cardiovascular disease, particular for the other spouse.

This is the first study to suggest ICU admission of a spouse may be a risk factor for cardiovascular disease and hospitalisation in the other spouse. Previous research shows that approximately a quarter to one-half of family members of a critically ill patient experience post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depressive. This is called the "post-intensive care syndrome-family." There are also studies about bereavement that show an increased risk of cardiovascular disease in the early weeks and months after a loved one dies. This is known as the broken-heart syndrome (or stress-induced cardiomyopathy or takutsobo cardiomyopathy).

In this study, researchers matched spouses of patients admitted to the ICU for more than two days with randomly selected people from a database of 6 million patients. More than 7800 spouses of patients admitted to the ICU were matched with over 31,000 randomly selected patients. The average age of the spouses was 54 years and 35% of the spouses were men. Data regarding cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular-related hospitalisation, and severe cardiovascular events were evaluated.

Findings show that compared to people without a spouse in the ICU, those with either a husband or wife in the ICU had increased risk of having a cardiovascular event such as heart attack, stroke, heart failure, chest pain, and irregular heart rhythm. Those with a spouse were also more likely to be hospitalised for cardiovascular disease and for severe cardiovascular events.

The large majority of studies that study the impact of care on family members of ICU patients have focused on mental health but there are no studies that examine the physical health of spouses and family members. There is a need to further explore this risk factor so that interventions and measures can be implemented to minimise the risk and to provide greater support and help to spouses.

Source: [American Heart Association](#)

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