ICU
MANAGEMENT & PRACTICE

Sex, Illness Severity and Mortality in ICU Patients

Women account for only about 35-45% of patients in the ICU. This is surprising since half of the world's population are women. This highlights a very pertinent question: do men and women have equitable access to the ICU?

There have been several clinical studies that have tried to determine sex differences in illness severity and survival. However, there have been no consistent results. Some studies show no difference between men and women and illness severity, while others report a statistically significant difference. Some authors report higher risk-adjusted mortality for women compared to men, while others find no such trends. Hence, it is clear that the findings are inconclusive and unclear.

However, understanding sex differences in critical illness is very important as it can help improve clinical outcomes for both men and women. If it can be confirmed that sex plays a role in the risk of dying from critical illness, interventions can be better tailored according to the sex of the patient. Understanding the impact of sex on critical illness can thus lead to novel and more personalised treatment options.

A study was conducted to investigate the association between sex and severity of illness and mortality of patients in the ICU. The primary outcomes of the study were illness severity using any validated illness severity score and mortality at any point reported in the study.

Findings showed that women tend to have higher illness severity scores at ICU admission compared to men. They also have higher risk-adjusted mortality than men at ICU discharge and at one year.

These findings clearly demonstrate the gap that exists in clinical evidence regarding sex differences in ICU patients. This should be an important area of research as more detailed knowledge could help improve patient outcomes in both men and women.

Source: Journal of Critical Care

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