Understanding the Moral Distress of Nurses Witnessing Medically Futile Care

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Key Points . . .

- Issues of medical futility have arisen as healthcare technology has made life-prolonging treatments possible.
- Nurses experience moral distress when they witness care that they consider futile.
- Nurses require emotional and spiritual support in instances of moral distress arising from futile care.

Medical futility, defined as life-sustaining care that is highly unlikely to result in meaningful survival, has become a topic of increased attention (Brody, Campbell, Faber-Langendoen, & Ogle, 1997; Callahan, 2003). Prominent cases depicted in the media combined