Introduction: There is a relationship between Intensive care patients losing the ability to speak and negative emotions(1). Nursing care is challenging when patients are unable to verbalise and factors like pain and comfort are misjudged. Our Intensive Care Unit has introduced a communication tool Intelligaze grid 3 which enables patients with primary motoric disorders to communicate their needs. A quality improvement study reviewed the methods of communication and interactions that our nurses use for patients who are ventilated. The objective of the study was to promote areas of improvement with communication in the ICU.

Methods: We used a mixed-methods qualitative and quantitative study to evaluate the communication tools used by our nursing staff to interact with ventilated patients. A convenient data sample for all nurses working on particular dates was collected which is 66% of the nursing workforce. The study has been approved as a Quality Assurance project by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Nepean Hospital.

Results: Sixty registered nurses (66%) participated in the study. The most common communication tool used with patients was closed YES/NO questions(27%), followed by hand gestures(21%), magnetic writing board(19.8%), lip reading(14.4%) and alphabet board(7.2%). The descriptive analysis identified challenges were levels of sedation, weakness, non-English speaking patients and delirium. A significant finding was that only 6% of nurses identified the patients message being understood and 5% acknowledged listening as effective communication.

Conclusion: Communication is a vital aspect of ICU nursing and is achieved through dialogue and specialised skills. The study concluded that ICU nurses find it difficult to communicate effectively with ventilated patients. The introduction of Intelligaze Grid 3 has improved patient communication and promotes holistic nursing care.