Medical futility is problematic in many ways, including the misuse of limited medical resources. As the cost of medical care rises, this will have a significant impact on sustainability. Simply put, these are resources that could benefit other patients not used effectively. This presentation looks at medical futility as it occurs in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU.) Studies have shown that conservatively the amount of medically ineffective treatment may be as high as 11%. Not only is it a monetary problem, but it is also an opportunity problem as patients that could benefit from the ICU are delayed admission because of a lack of beds.

The causes of medical futility in the ICU are many and include issues with the patient and family and the physicians and medical staff. Solutions would consist of better communication and education. There are currently programs and organizations that evaluate seriously ill patients downstream even before admission to the ICU.