

## Responsibilities, Risks and Management of Frontline Nurses during Covid-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

Nurses have been frontline health workers being continuously exposed to infected patients for their care and treatment. The immediate response, workload, physical and psychological stress and Covid-19 infection have raised major health issues among nurses. The role of nurses is not limited within the patient care but extends further in professional teams and communities. Maintenance of effective communication to mollify the risk of global pandemic by playing a central role for managing, controlling the infectious disease remains crucial. There seems a great need for Government, policy makers, nursing groups and health care organizations to advocate the nurses both during and following a worldwide outbreak.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Nurses, Risk, Responsibility, Management

### INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 which emerged out in Wuhan City, China in December of 2019 has globally infected over 41,570,883 people and 11,34,940 deaths to date. Since Covid-19 has been reported from all over the world, the WHO declared it as pandemic outbreak in March, 2020.<sup>1</sup> SARS-CoV-2 has been associated with Mild to severe respiratory illness which can be transmitted through aerosols, direct/indirect physical contacts, during medical cases and in laboratory sample handling.<sup>2</sup> The mass infected human population with large cases of symptomatic Covid-19 patients have to be admitted in isolation ward of hospitals. This indeed created the chaos situation that required immediate need of rapid response team with front line health workers. Doctors and Nurses plays a vital role in the management of the patients during this pandemic. Understanding the importance of nurse's role in the Covid-19 pandemic and their contribution, it is essential to ensure the safety and protection of those frontline care givers who provide care to the infected patients. The effectiveness and role of nurses grow more during major health crisis, disaster and pandemics such as Covid-19.<sup>3</sup>

#### Role and Responsibilities

Nearly 14 days of long incubation period is one of the challenges of Covid-19 as it delays the time in early diagnosis of infection. This reveals a high risk and threat to health care members, especially the nurses who are always in the initial contact with the infected persons. They are always frontline health care professionals who stand near the patient facing complex diseases who require long term hospitalization and intensive critical care. As an educator,

the nurses play a crucial role in providing public education about the preventive measures and reducing the spread of misinformation during this worldwide response.<sup>4</sup> American Academy of Nursing, 2017 policy brief declared nurses as the key in preventing widespread illness through their skills and education of developing coordinated global network and properly identifying the infectious diseases.<sup>5</sup>

Nurses act as a pioneer in healing the psychological problems of patients during Covid-19 by providing consistent reassurance and support to the fearful patients during the different phases of the diseases. Not only fear, but the covid-19 patients are more susceptible to severe emotional and psychological trauma as they have immense reason for panic, especially at the time when they are quarantined and separated from their home and families. During this period of severe stress, the nurses remain as the healers who can calm the patients and pacify their doubts and the dangers of disease.

#### Risks and Challenges

During the peak incidence of Covid-19, many patients required the ventilator and oxygen support which developed a need for conversion of general beds into ICU. Further many nurses were also transformed to be trained in Intensive care medicine. This resulted in rise in physical

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and psychological workload for nurses.<sup>6</sup> Many frontline nurses suffered and faced a threat to their own lives during the service in this pandemic. For e.g. In Italy many nurses during the Covid-19 pandemic lost their lives as a result of Covid-19 infection, lack of sleep, when having skin breakdown and bruises for using tightened faced mask and working nonstop decreased their attention towards protection.<sup>7</sup> Due to use of multiple layers of protective gear for long time many nurses developed pressure on the ears and forehead. Despite this occupational risk the nurses continued to provide the patient care as the frontline in the hospital and also carried out the assessment and monitoring in the outpatients and community settings.<sup>8</sup>

However, many nurses face emotional strain, extreme fatigue and physical exhaustion. Due to prolong working hours and busy tight schedule. In addition, many of them have tested positive for Covid-19. Therefore, it is very much important to provide mental support to the nurses to fight against Covid-19. Studies have revealed that prolonged work of nurses in addition to psychological stress arising due to their co-workers being critically ill and at times death from Covid-19 has resulted in deterioration of their performances.

### Management

The active involvement of nurses as well as nursing students in clinical care, education and information sharing updated learning on specific risks in areas of practical and implementation of the public health policy is of great need during this pandemic. Basic consideration must be given that all the nurses exposed to infection contagious disease Covid-19 patients must undergo PCR test on a weekly basis. Further, special attention should be given to nurses' protection by providing intense education, training, and implementation of an infection control system through observation and monitoring of the activities, conduction of psychological counselling programs for nurses, establishing a scientific reasonable shift for the nurses avoiding unnecessary contact to minimize cross transmission.

The importance of nursing role in the control of pandemic needs to be recognized. Nurses should have a proper and prompt access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to ensure their safety. They must receive clear, concise and

updated information about effective and best nursing practices in patient care. There is need to increase the number of staffs to ensure that nurses are able to take leave in case of illness.

Nurses should be supported in managing family responsibilities and maintain safe contact and communication with their families which can be helpful for them to reduce psychological stress. The government, policy maker, community must closely monitor nurses support and needs during outbreak in order to promote their physical, mental as well as social wellbeing.

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