

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nursing profession

To the Editor,

The COVID-19 pandemic has profound effects on different levels of society in the fight against the disease. Among them, nurses are one of the main healthcare workers in the clinical setting who have faced many challenges in the provision of high-quality care during the COVID-19 pandemic (Catania et al., 2021). However, this pandemic offers unprecedented opportunities and lessons for the future that is debatable. At a glance, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nursing profession can be assessed at three levels: (1) clinical, (2) managerial and (3) educational.

CLINICAL

In clinical settings, nurses are at high risk for contracting the virus due to direct contact with COVID-19 patients. Also, the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) is another threat to their health and that of their families. In addition, nurses' physical and psychological stress during caring for COVID-19 patients caused them to leave the job due to stress associated with family separation, lack of sleep, burnout, insufficient manpower and high workload (Fernandez et al., 2020). A study in Egypt showed that nurses experience high levels of stress (75%), workload (98.6%) and coping with death (96.7%) during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the contrary, 51% of nurses reported low job satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eventually, this pandemic led to the intention to leave 96.2% of nurses (Said & El-Shafei, 2021). Therefore, it is suggested that researchers consider the challenges of clinical settings to facilitate the management of similar pandemics in the future.

MANAGERIAL

Nursing managers and policymakers have faced major challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as insufficient resources and manpower, and systemic and ethical weaknesses in crisis management (Poortaghi et al., 2021). Due to the high workload and stressful workplace conditions among nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is very important to increase their motivation, resilience and job satisfaction for optimal performance. In this regard, a content analysis study in Iran showed that during the management of the

COVID-19 pandemic, special attention is needed to the management of manpower recruitment (volunteer and non-volunteer manpower), management of manpower arrangement (flexible work schedule and rearrangement of the manpower) and management of manpower retention (preventive and motivational measures, and psychological support) (Poortaghi et al., 2021). Another qualitative study in Italy showed that important issues to be considered by managers include organizational and logistic change, leadership models adopted to emergency management, changes in nursing approaches, PPE, physical and psychological impact on nurses, and team value and spirit (Catania et al., 2021). Therefore, management in critical situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic requires the use of flexible and situational management principles (Poortaghi et al., 2021).

EDUCATIONAL

The COVID-19 pandemic provided positive and negative effects on nursing education. At the beginning of the pandemic, many nursing colleges were closed to ensure the safety of students. As the pandemic spread, many universities and colleges changed students' educational methods from face-to-face to virtual. This action led to maintaining the health of students and faculty members, especially in more prevalent countries. In contrast, this measure had a negative impact on students' learning (Agu et al., 2021). Also, students' e-learning had challenges such as inequality in access to learning (limited access, type and capacity of mobile phone batteries), limitations related to geographical areas (lack of Internet access, insufficient financial resources and lack of access to textbooks) and the ability to use online platforms that decreases with age (Agu et al., 2021).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges in three areas of clinical, managerial and education in the nursing profession, it also provides lessons for the future. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an important issue in the nursing profession was the impact on bedside nurses. Paying attention to the physical and mental aspects of nurses as front-line fighters against this pandemic can lead to better management of the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 patients. On the contrary, nursing managers experienced many managerial challenges during this period. For example, lack of sufficient skills of staff in infection control, lack of resources and inadequate quantity and quality of PPEs were some

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of the management challenges for nursing managers and policymakers that require special planning and attention (Catania et al., 2021). Appropriate management decision-making and the development of immediate guidelines for different challenges provide a valuable opportunity to apply these experiences to control future pandemics. In the training of students and nurses, valuable experiences were provided to professors, students and administrators of institutions, especially in developing countries that have suffered more from this pandemic (Agu et al., 2021). The use of new technologies for online education such as core technologies, virtual reality and augmented reality simulations can be part of the main method of nursing education after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

None.

Nazila Javadi-Pashaki^{1,2}

Mohammad Javad Ghazanfari³ 

Samad Karkhah^{4,5,6} 

¹*Social Determinants of Health Research Center (SDHRC),
Guilan University of Medical Sciences, Rasht, Iran*

²*Department of Nursing, Cardiovascular Diseases Research
Center, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Guilan University of
Medical Sciences, Rasht, Iran*

³*Department of Medical-Surgical Nursing, School of Nursing and
Midwifery, Kashan University of Medical Sciences, Kashan, Iran*

⁴*Department of Medical-Surgical Nursing, School of Nursing and
Midwifery, Guilan University of Medical Sciences, Rasht, Iran*

⁵*Burn and Regenerative Medicine Research Center, Guilan
University of Medical Sciences, Rasht, Iran*

⁶*Quchan School of Nursing, Mashhad University of Medical
Sciences, Mashhad, Iran*

Correspondence

Samad Karkhah, Department of Medical-Surgical Nursing,
School of Nursing and Midwifery, Guilan University of
Medical Sciences, Rasht, Iran.
Email: sami.karkhah@yahoo.com

ORCID

Mohammad Javad Ghazanfari  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3555-6044>

[org/0000-0003-3555-6044](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3555-6044)

Samad Karkhah  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9193-9176>

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