# Mental Health of Nurses During COVID-19

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## Abstract

Nurses have been stretched and pushed to their limits mentally, physically, emotionally and have faced multiple struggles leading to burnout, compassion fatigue, job dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, PTSD, and emotional exhaustion. Nurse retention has plummeted because of the increased workplace stress. There is a crucial need to help nurses develop and use healthy coping strategies to combat the mental health issues they are experiencing in the workplace.

## PICO Question

For registered nurses in the intensive care unit, does a nurse education program addressing COVID-19 related burnout and the promotion of evidence-based coping mechanisms increase the use of nurses' coping skills, promoting better mental health?

## Literature Review

The literature on frontline nurses' increased stress, anxiety, and burnout related to the pandemic indicates the critical need for emotional support and training on practical, healthy coping strategies (1-3,8).

Three significant barriers
- nurse retention and job satisfaction (6,10)
- leadership presence (5)
- availability of organizational resources to improve mental health (5,10)

Benefits include
- increased nurse retention (6,10)
- increased job satisfaction (6,10)
- improved leadership relations (5)
- increased resources and availability (5,10)

## Project Methodology

This section reflects some of the assessment tools and resources provided to aid in developing strategies and interventions to improve the mental health of nurses (1,8). The participants for this project consist of ICU nurses but can be applied to nurses in any unit or location.

1. The focus of the activity interventions include good sleeping habits, relaxation techniques, medications, herbal remedies, sleep restrictions, cognitive behavioral therapy, light therapy, and exercise (7).
2. Healthy coping mechanisms are crucial for everyone when challenging times occur in life (1). Gaining unique coping skills may allow nurses to find balance in chaotic work environments now and in the future.

## Plan and Development

The plan was to educate and empower nurses to take control of their mental health and discover coping strategies to help combat the effect of COVID-19.

Developed resources were utilized including
- PowerPoints to teach coping strategies in person and virtually
- Posters sent out via emails as reminders for activities
- Inspiration cards put on lockers as a positive reinforcement reminder for individuals
- Surveys handed out to evaluate progress
- Emails utilized for continuous communication and updates on activities, trainings, and time availabilities.
- Newsletters with highlighted coping strategies.
- Mental health professionals made available to the unit and their schedules shared via email
- Break room stocked with healthy snacks


Figure 1

## Evaluation

The literature focusing on the mental health of frontline nurses during the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates a crucial need for nursing support and dedicated leaders in the healthcare industry (8).

- Nurses were asked to participate via email in the Depression and Anxiety Stress Scale 21 (DASS) survey to assess and evaluate their mental health. These surveys were completed anonymously and helped direct the project before and after the presentations.
- Evaluation of the project was through patient and employee satisfaction scores, nurse retention, burnout feedback, and effective use of coping strategies.
- At the six-month mark, we evaluated the surveys collected and made adjustments and changes to our implementation to be more effective and beneficial to the nurses

## Framework

The framework used to guide this project was the IOWA evidence-based practice model to promote quality practice and policies in healthcare. This problem-solving approach to making clinical decisions integrates the best evidence from influential studies with experience from clinicians and preferences from patients. It has manifested great effectiveness for making and sustaining evidence-based practice changes (4).


Figure 2

## Conclusions

This literature review provided insight into the many challenges and stresses that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many healthcare professionals have sought other locations for employment or have left the profession altogether. Even before the pandemic, medical professionals were in high demand and are even more so now. Educating frontline nurses about the trauma affecting their mental health and providing healthy coping tools to combat their challenges can reignite the fire that pushes nurses forward to save lives and help others. Coping mechanisms, leadership support, and a positive work environment can improve nurse retention and reduce job burnout leading to better outcomes for nurses and patients (1).

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## Figures

1.Stress and Relax Image https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQGQA0_DX1w4DGzoNPE5H_VPLQ11gYR-rw7dcmLwaM6U-mlvoC-&s
2.Covid 19 Image: https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSor-T9wdUXKhvK-9FhCSJl5OmBAOMr1uB9cpXt_24U39WerJW6&s