



## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON NURSING PRACTICE

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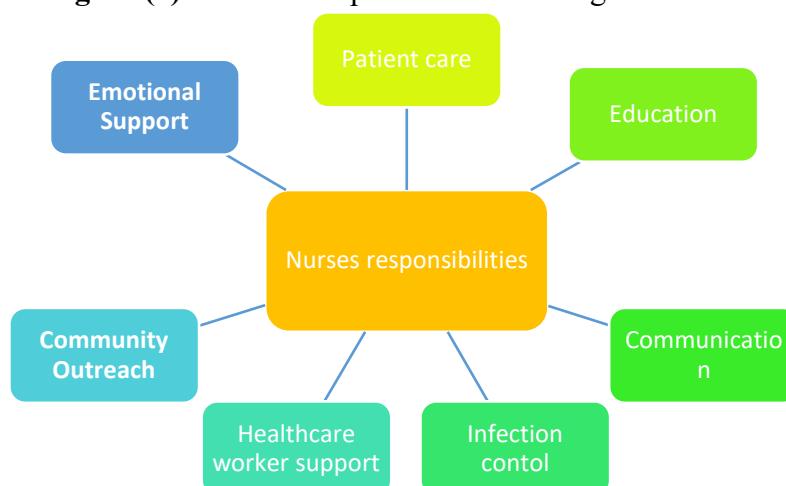
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### Abstract:

The role of nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia and its effects on them have impacted different facets of their professional and personal lives. This includes an increased workload, levels of stress, and a heightened vulnerability to the virus as they fulfill frontline duties in healthcare settings. Nurses have had to quickly adapt to new protocols and guidelines, thereby expending substantial efforts to provide healthcare services to patients during this challenging period despite all challenges.

### Introduction:

Healthcare policies have undergone significant transformations throughout various pandemics in history. The World Health Organization (WHO) introduced a pandemic preparedness plan in 2018, underlining the significance of preparing for potential threats.[1]. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light profound disparities, prompting the implementation of new health policy financing and interventions aimed at addressing social determinants of health to enhance equity within healthcare systems. Research findings have demonstrated that pandemics such as COVID-19 underscore the critical necessity for a comprehensive comprehension of how healthcare systems respond to infectious pathogens, highlighting the need for healthcare policies to evolve continuously. From historical pandemics like Smallpox and Influenza to the more recent COVID-19 outbreak, each crisis has spurred the development of innovative approaches such as telemedicine, illustrating the ongoing evolution of healthcare policies geared towards effectively controlling and managing the disease.[2]

**Figure (1): Nurse's Responsibilities During the Pandemic****Saudi Arabia During Covid-19:**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Saudi Arabia underwent significant transformations in its healthcare infrastructure. The Saudi Ministry of Health swiftly introduced cutting-edge technologies, notably telemedicine, to enrich healthcare strategizing and implementation and foster enduring enhancements extending beyond the pandemic. The utilization of telemedicine services in Saudi Arabia witnessed remarkable rates, characterized by prompt responsiveness in consultations, medication renewals, and household healthcare appointments. This success story of telemedicine in Saudi Arabia not only resulted in elevated levels of patient contentment but also instilled confidence in the adaptability of healthcare systems.[3]

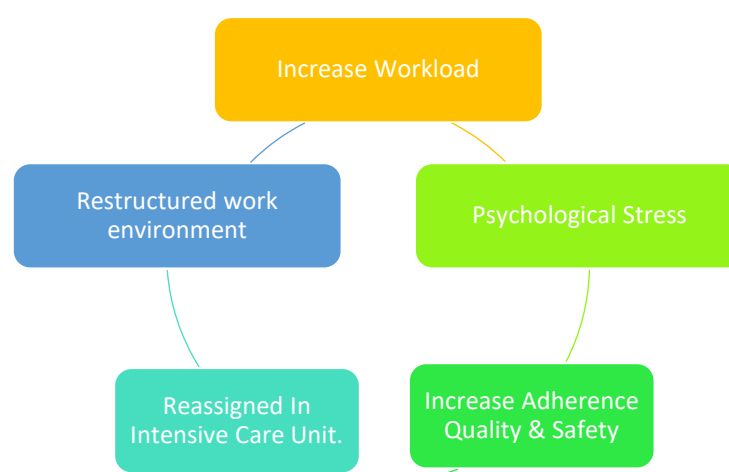
**Obstacles Encountered by Nurse's Pre-Pandemic:**

Before the onset of the global pandemic, nurses were confronted with various difficulties when adjusting to unforeseen circumstances that arose during the pandemic period, necessitating quick thinking and readiness for implementing necessary actions even in healthcare settings that were not previously considered as sources of reference. Moreover, the absence of adequate readiness for pandemics, limited clinical resources, and the overwhelming workload pressure led to ethical dilemmas, moral anguish, and apprehensions regarding the availability of personal protective equipment among the nursing staff. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure the resilience and effectiveness of the nursing workforce in the face of unprecedented healthcare crises and to uphold the ethical standards and integrity of the profession amidst challenging circumstances.[4,5]

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary focus of nurse education was centered around traditional clinical practices within hospital environments. Nevertheless, significant gaps were evident in adequately preparing nurses to respond to epidemics and emergencies on a global scale effectively. It had become apparent that some educational institutions had taken proactive measures by integrating virtual simulations into their curriculum as substitutes for face-to-face clinical training to augment students' readiness to tackle real-life crises. Furthermore, various research endeavors have been carried out to design and evaluate the impact of particular educational initiatives, such as the COVID-19 education program tailored for nursing students, to enhance their competencies, knowledge base, and self-assurance in managing emerging infectious diseases. In essence, a consensus was emerging within the academic and healthcare sectors regarding the imperative need to revamp nurse education methodologies to adequately prepare healthcare professionals to confront unanticipated challenges like pandemics in the future[6]. Nurse education in Saudi Arabia pre-pandemic primarily focused on traditional teaching methodologies. However, there was a gradual shift towards online learning platforms even before the COVID-19 outbreak. This shift was indicative of an ongoing evolution in the educational practices within nursing, showcasing a proactive approach towards incorporating digital tools for enhanced learning experiences among students. Not

only that, but the adoption of simulation-based learning (SBL) has also gained recognition as an efficient pedagogical strategy in nursing education, offering a secure setting for students to develop their clinical competencies in a controlled environment. The significance placed on equipping nurses with the necessary skills to handle infectious diseases such as COVID-19 was apparent, as various research studies underscored the crucial role of nurses' awareness and readiness in responding to such outbreaks effectively. The evolving landscape of nursing education in Saudi Arabia was geared towards integrating modern technologies and innovative teaching methodologies to enrich students' educational journey and adequately equip them for the upcoming healthcare challenges[7,8]. Moreover, a particular study shed light on the commendable level of awareness and preparedness exhibited by oncology nurses in Saudi Arabia in managing COVID-19 patients, indicating a solid foundation in healthcare knowledge and readiness already in place before the global health crisis. In essence, the nursing education sector in Saudi Arabia has already been embracing technological advancements and inventive teaching approaches to enhance student's learning experiences and sharpen their clinical skills for a more robust professional practice. [9]

**Figure (2):** Different aspects affecting nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Nurses' Role During the Pandemic:

During pandemics such as the current COVID-19 crisis, nurses play an indispensable and pivotal role that cannot be understated. Nurses must concentrate on cultivating resilience, effectively handling stressors, and balancing their professional duties and personal safety concerns. To protect themselves and others, nurses must strictly adhere to pandemic protocols, including correctly using appropriate masks, practicing social distancing, and staying informed about vaccinations and updates. Furthermore, they must emphasize their commitment to their profession, actively seek mental health support when needed, and employ various coping mechanisms such as fostering teamwork, engaging in open communication with their families, and continuously educating themselves about the virus and its implications.[10,11]

Nursing managers' supportive leadership is crucial in ensuring the well-being and effectiveness of nurses on the front lines of combating the pandemic. Nursing managers must monitor their staff's mental health and offer psychological counseling to assist them in coping with their challenges. Nurses constantly juggle external pressures such as resource management and internal stressors like emotional exhaustion and moral dilemmas. As leaders, nurses display resilience by exemplifying self-awareness, utilizing effective coping strategies, and employing relational leadership styles to support their teams during these trying times. [12]

While nurses may not have a strict obligation to model healthy behaviors, they have a moral responsibility to set an example by following pandemic precautions like wearing masks and practicing social distancing. The ongoing pandemic has underscored nurses' critical role in alleviating disease

burdens, identifying problems, and devising intervention strategies. Policymakers must acknowledge and support the diverse roles and responsibilities nurses undertake during crises of this magnitude. [12]

Nurses' perspectives regarding risk and safety during the COVID-19 outbreak substantially impact their well-being and the level of care they deliver, a critical factor that cannot be overlooked. Extensive research findings indicate a direct correlation between heightened perceptions of risk and unfavorable outcomes in terms of both physical and psychological health status among nursing professionals. The accounts provided by nurses depict their journey through this challenging period as resembling a grueling marathon, underscoring the sheer exhaustion and emotional strain they endure while tending to patients amidst the ongoing health crisis. Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge the pivotal role played by the patient safety climate within healthcare institutions in determining nurses' commitment to their roles, with various factors such as organizational support and staffing levels exerting a profound influence on the overall quality of care delivered and the degree of job satisfaction experienced by nursing staff. The escalated workload experienced by nurses during the pandemic has been consistently linked to a diminished quality of work life, thereby underscoring the critical need for interventions that address the physical and mental stressors nurses face, in addition to ensuring equitable remuneration and conducive working environments. Ultimately, safeguarding the well-being of nurses and optimizing their work conditions are indispensable prerequisites for sustaining high-quality patient care and promoting a supportive and fulfilling professional environment within healthcare settings. [13,14]

### **The Nurses' Contribution in COVID-19 Prevention:**

Nurses have a pivotal role in preventing COVID-19 through their expertise, attitudes, behaviors, and capacity to respond to emergencies. Various studies emphasize the significance of nurses' understanding of strategies for preventing COVID-19, encompassing knowledge of how the virus spreads, its symptoms, and the correct utilization of personal protective equipment (PPE). Elements that impact nurses' implementation of infection prevention and control measures consist of their self-awareness, dedication, and the quality of training they receive. Furthermore, the actions taken by nurses in response to emergencies, such as their ability to prevent infections and their skills in assisting, have a notable effect on the overall reaction to COVID-19. The level of readiness nurses exhibit in managing and preventing COVID-19 is influenced by factors like their level of education, years of experience in the field, and their engagement in training programs.

### **COVID-19 Consequences on Nurse**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nurses has been profound, affecting various aspects of their professional lives, including their well-being, workload, and job satisfaction. Numerous research studies have revealed that nurses have been subjected to an increased emotional burden, heightened feelings of isolation, and a surge in workload during this challenging period. The global health crisis has led to a range of adverse psychological effects on nurses, such as elevated levels of stress, anxiety, burnout, and depression, particularly affecting women and individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds. Furthermore, healthcare professionals working amidst the pandemic have encountered obstacles to effective communication, compromised patient safety, reduced quality of care, and a sense of being undervalued or dispensable. The overwhelming pressure on the healthcare system has also disrupted essential health services, prompting many nurses to contemplate leaving their positions due to excessive work demands or inadequate remuneration. This collective impact underscores the urgent need to establish more robust support mechanisms, enhancements in working conditions, and better readiness for potential future crises and emergencies. In conclusion, addressing these multifaceted challenges is crucial in safeguarding the well-being and resilience of the nursing workforce in the face of ongoing and future healthcare crises. [2,5,15]

**Impact of working in ICU during the pandemic:**

Working in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) amidst the COVID-19 outbreak has profoundly affected the healthcare workforce. Professionals in ICUs have encountered heightened levels of perceived stress, psychological distress, and ethical dilemmas, resulting in moral distress and quandaries regarding end-of-life choices. This has been observed among staff members such as nurses, doctors, and respiratory therapists, who face a significant risk of emotional burnout, depersonalization, and inadequacy. These challenges encompass material and physical aspects and emotional dimensions, fostering greater interprofessional teamwork while underscoring the crucial necessity for improved communication and recognition from leadership. The pandemic has necessitated the retraining of non-ICU nurses to provide care in ICUs, with the effectiveness of their coping strategies and resilience being heavily influenced by the quality of their training and preparedness. In general, the pandemic has adversely affected the working atmosphere, staffing levels, and institutional support, impacting ICU healthcare providers' professional and personal lives significantly. [16,17].

**The Nurses' Position Post-Pandemic Period:**

Post-pandemic, nurses are currently encountering a myriad of significant alterations and hurdles in their field of work. The nursing profession has transformed into what is now being referred to as "The Era of Metamodern Nursing," acknowledging the enduring effects of the pandemic on nursing methodologies and educational approaches. Nurses are shifting their viewpoints, care provision strategies, and overall well-being, emphasizing comprehensive self-care practices and the need for systemic-level assistance to uphold their overall wholeness. Furthermore, newly graduated nurses are entering their roles with a need for more clinical exposure, resulting in diminished self-assurance and underscoring the criticality of supplementary educational initiatives to enhance their knowledge base and retention capabilities. Nurses' work-life quality has been impacted, with working conditions, surroundings, and stress levels influencing their holistic well-being. In the aftermath of the pandemic, nurses navigate a modified terrain that demands adaptability, backing, and a redefined professional persona. [18,19]

**Conclusion:**

The COVID-19 pandemic drove major global changes in healthcare and nursing, emphasizing preparedness and innovation. Successes in telemedicine and nurse education advancement countered challenges like resource scarcity and ethical dilemmas. Nurses showed dedication and resilience during the crisis, revealing the need for better support systems and education for future emergencies. Post-pandemic, prioritizing nurse well-being, education, and support in healthcare settings is crucial for resilience and effective patient care in future health crises.

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