

# The Role of Nursing Professionals and Challenges Encountered in the Effective Containment of the Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, which emerged in the form of a cluster of cases in a single city has spread around the globe at a rapid pace. The contribution of the nursing professionals in the effective containment of the ongoing pandemic has been immense. The purpose of the current review is to explore the role of nursing professionals in the effective containment of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. An extensive search of all materials related to the topic was carried out in the PubMed search engine and the World Health Organization website and a total of 19 articles were selected based on the suitability with the current review objectives. It will not come as a surprise that almost all the nations across the world were not well prepared to effectively respond to the outbreak and that was quite evident in terms of lacunae in planning, preparation, organization, and leadership. In fact, owing to the shortage of personal protective equipment, there was always a threat that any of the healthcare professionals would might become the next statistics in the ongoing pandemic. The issues encountered by the nursing professional were not simple and they essentially demand serious consideration to have a better response in the future. To conclude, the dynamics of life have changed and it is no longer the same. The nursing professionals displayed immense resilience and mental strength regardless of the workload and ethical dilemma. It is the need of the hour to support them and improve their quality of lives to sustain our battle against the ongoing pandemic.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic, ethics, nursing

## INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, which emerged in the form of a cluster of cases in a single city has spread around the globe at a rapid pace and has now been reported in more than 222 nations and territories.<sup>[1]</sup> The disease has already attained the pandemic status and has accounted for more than 227940972 cases and 4682899 million deaths. The global case fatality rate of infection has been estimated as 2.05%, with the American and the European region been the most affected.<sup>[1]</sup> The novel viral infection has affected each and every aspect of human lives and has resulted in a sense of fear and apprehension among the general population.

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As we all are still recovering from the original strain of the causative virus, the genomic analysis of the virus has reported a variant of SARS-CoV-2 in South Africa, which further complicates the issue worldwide.<sup>[1]</sup> The health care professionals are quite vulnerable to the infection, as they are actively involved in the care, management, and rehabilitation of the infected people. Further, owing to the transmission of the infection predominantly by close contact and droplets, it

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makes it an extremely challenging and high-risk job profile for the health professionals.<sup>[2]</sup> The purpose of the current review is to explore the role of nursing professionals in the effective containment of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

## METHODS

An extensive search of all materials related to the topic was carried out in the PubMed search engine and the World Health Organization website. Relevant research articles focusing on COVID-19 and nursing professionals published in the period from March 2020 to April 2021 were included in the review. A total of 22 studies similar to current study objectives were identified initially, of which, three were excluded due to the unavailability of the complete version of the articles. Overall, 19 articles were selected based on the suitability with the current review objectives and analyzed. Keywords used in the search include COVID-19 and nursing professionals in the title alone only (viz. COVID-19 [ti] AND nursing [ti]; COVID-19 [ti] AND challenges [ti]). The articles published in only English language were included in the current review [Figure 1].

The collected information is presented under the following subheadings, namely, COVID-19 pandemic and nursing professionals, public health challenges in the containment of the pandemic, issues encountered by nursing professionals, implications for future, and implications for research.

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND NURSING PROFESSIONALS

The contribution of the nursing professionals in the effective containment of the ongoing pandemic has been immense and this has been primarily because of the fact that they are putting their lives on the line to save the lives of the infected persons.<sup>[2,3]</sup> Moreover, the nursing professionals have even sacrificed their family lives and have shown remarkable resilience in these testing times.<sup>[4,5]</sup> In the initial stages of the outbreak, while not much was known about the novel infection, there was a lot of anxiety, fear, and chaos among the people about the infection.<sup>[6-8]</sup> Many infected people were succumbing to the infection, and all the healthcare professionals, including the nursing professionals were at the receiving end by the distressed family members.<sup>[2,6]</sup>

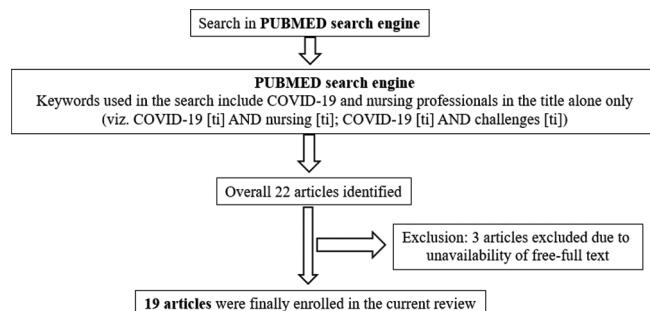


Figure 1: Flowchart for selection of research articles

## PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES IN THE CONTAINMENT OF THE PANDEMIC

It will not come as a surprise that almost all the nations across the world were not well prepared to effectively respond to the outbreak and that was quite evident in terms of lacunae in planning, preparation, organization, and leadership.<sup>[6,9-14]</sup> There was an acute shortage of personal protective equipment, hospitals were not ready to accommodate the huge number of people who were diagnosed with infection and there was shortage even with regard to ventilators and medications.<sup>[9]</sup> Moreover, we were exposed to the challenges pertaining to shortage of diagnostic kits, quick laboratory results, and identification of an effective treatment protocol that can save lives of the infected people.<sup>[10-12]</sup>

Furthermore, with the emergence of multiple vaccines, the issues to ensure geographic accessibility, ensuring that all the people are immunized, increase in the production of vaccines, and strategies to enhance the acceptance of vaccine.<sup>[13,14]</sup> The management of the COVID-19 pandemic was further complicated by infodemic and a wide range of misconceptions and fake news were spreading across the social media and other platforms.<sup>[2,6,15]</sup>

## ISSUES ENCOUNTERED BY NURSING PROFESSIONALS

A sudden rise in the workload of the nursing professional was observed, as many of them got infected, and had to be quarantined. The pressure of work continued to rise and they had minimum time to react to the health emergency.<sup>[7,16]</sup> In fact, in the initial period of the pandemic, owing to the shortage of personal protective equipment, there was always a threat that any of the healthcare professionals would might become the next statistics in the ongoing pandemic.<sup>[6,15-17]</sup> The estimates released in May 2020 revealed that in excess of 90,000 health professionals got infected while discharging their duties, while more than 260 nursing professionals succumbed to the disease-related complications.<sup>[2]</sup>

We must acknowledge that the nursing staff was not only exposed to the infection in health facilities but also in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.<sup>[17,18]</sup> The novel infection also accounted for the psychological trauma, social isolation, and psychological conditions among all the frontline workers, including the nursing professional.<sup>[6,8]</sup> While all these developments were going on, many of the hospitals were closed, and thus so many of the nursing staff lost their source of livelihood due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown.<sup>[19]</sup> Despite all these developments and uncertainty, and the prevailing ethical dilemma or the ongoing debate about human rights, the nursing professionals across the health care establishments took an important and prompt decision to maintain the well-being of the patients.<sup>[2,15]</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE

The ongoing pandemic has taught us multiple things and it has reemphasized the need to have better preparedness and

an effective public health emergency response system. The issues encountered by the nursing professional were not simple and they essentially demand serious consideration to have a better response in the future.<sup>[3-5]</sup> There is a significant need to either develop or revamp the existing ethical framework, and thus all the stakeholders of the nursing profession should join their hands to come out with a holistic framework.<sup>[2]</sup> There is a definite scope for qualitative research to explore the experiences of the nursing professional and give them due to acknowledgment.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Considering the fact that the nursing professionals played an instrumental role in the management of COVID-19 among the infected patients, it is the need of the hour to intensify research activities, so that the better practices can be identified and widely publicized for implementation in heterogeneous settings. This essentially includes studies targeting the identification of perception, knowledge, and practices of the nursing professionals toward the COVID-19 and the relevant appropriate behaviors.<sup>[20]</sup> It will be also good to employ mixed methods research or qualitative study designs to get in-depth insights into the existing practices.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the dynamics of life have changed and it is no longer the same. The nursing professionals displayed immense resilience and mental strength regardless of the workload and ethical dilemma. It is the need of the hour to support them and improve their quality of lives to sustain our battle against the ongoing pandemic.

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## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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