Combating COVID-19 in SRM Medical College Hospital, Tamil Nadu, South India: an overview

Ms. Amutha Christinal¹, Ms. Catherine Priyadharsini ², Ms. Annie Jasline ³ & Ms. Reji Baby ⁴

¹ Nursing Superintendent  
² Deputy Nursing Superintendent  
³ Clinical Instructor, Department of Nursing  
⁴ Administrative Coordinator, Department of Nursing  
SRM Medical College Hospital & Research Centre, Potheri, Tamil Nadu.

Abstract

COVID 19 infodemic has created a great impact in all spheres of life including physical, social, mental health, economy, education, farm industry and so on. This alarming pandemic is surging globally causing ambiguous future. Health care frontline workers of SRM Medical College Hospital & Research Centre, Tamil Nadu are striving hard to combat the disease vigorously with great dedication and commitment. New process flows are specially designed to cater comprehensive care to the health of patients admitted with novel COVID 19. This paper unfolds the breath taking experiences of our nurses while caring for patients admitted with COVID 19 infection.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, nursing experience

Introduction

The novel COVID 19, an infodemic created global health and socio economic crisis has further spawned democratic and human rights disruptions [⁴]. Normal life has come to a pause for millions of people across the globe. By virtue of the
pandemic and global recession, World Bank has cautioned that 150 million people could decline into “extreme poverty” by the end of 2021\textsuperscript{[1]}. As per WHO reports, more than 42 million confirmed COVID 19 cases (10% of global population\textsuperscript{[5]} and more than one million deaths occurred worldwide\textsuperscript{[12]} . The number of COVID cases exceeds 7 million in India with more than one million deaths \textsuperscript{[14]} . Encountering this alarming disease is truly challenging and fear mongering.

**Impact of the pandemic**

While health care personnel and researchers are working hard in the frontline to bring the emerging pandemic to an end, unsure opportunities and hidden risks evolve. An explorative qualitative study (Mathew et al., May 2020) that was done to detect the challenges among the frontline health care workers, reported that the lack of preparedness for the pandemic generated a lot of bewilderment, fear and panic \textsuperscript{[7]} . Moreover, the repercussion of COVID 19 has precipitated stress and anxiety leading to mind wandering, hampering the intellectual functioning, job performance and every day’s chores \textsuperscript{[2]}.

Appropriate usage of Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE) impedes infection transmission by breaking the chain of infection transmission. Nevertheless, a cohort study (David A Drew et al., Sept 2020) discloses that the health care workers possess an increased risk of contracting this deadly disease in spite of using adequate PPEs \textsuperscript{[10]}.

Social activities and shopping has predominantly become online. Learning institutions are shut down disrupting the conventional education system and forced us to transit to e-learning and digitalized teaching methodologies. Simulation based
learning, though less effective has surfaced during the pandemic as an alternative. The online assessment tools used in place of the traditional school exams is likely to be biased. Families are compelled to endow major inputs in child’s learning. It is implausible for home schooling to recover the learning lapsed from school\textsuperscript{[11]}.

The unexpected shift to online learning with improper training and preparedness is likely to potentiate a sluggish student learning experience in disadvantaged countries. However, virtual learning has greatly impacted the global education (UNESCO). Besides the challenge of internet access and technological huddles, it is believed to father a new model of education strategy that could continue in post COVID times\textsuperscript{[13]}.

The pandemic has also affected the farm economy. In India, 58\% of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood\textsuperscript{[6]}.

The travel restrictions and lockdowns have impacted the pre and post harvest food supply chain. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has formulated various guidelines to help the farmers in storage and procurement of the crops\textsuperscript{[3]}.

An e- survey done by the European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions (Sept, 2020) has brought to light that quality of life of the people and their societies were altered during the arduous time of COVID 19. The highlights of the study are the presence of varied levels of job insecurity, most of the workers reported positive tele-working experience. Young people expressed lowest level of well-being. In addition, the work–life balance is affected for women more than men\textsuperscript{[8]}.

\textit{Encountering COVID 19 in SRM Medical College Hospital & Research Centre, Potheri, Tamilnadu}

Annals of Tropical Medicine & Public Health : \texttt{http://doi.org/10.36295/ASRO.2020.2323138}
SRM Medical College Hospital & Research Centre, Chengalpettu is a 1212 bedded tertiary hospital that caters to the health needs of the populace. SRM substantially commenced the admission of COVID 19 inpatients since 4th May 2020. We struggled through tremendous hurdles and challenges in setting up the COVID units. Amidst the reluctance and panic of the nurses in the outset to handle the COVID positive patients, we were focused on achieving unprecedented patient care.

The COVID zone is bifurcated into patient care area and documentation unit. Special supervisors are allotted for the same. The contemporary scenario with COVID-19 has propelled us to draft new job descriptions for the newly deputed Incharges and supervisors to shun negligence and duplication of work. Almost 30% of the nursing fraternity is designated to the COVID zone. The nurses from their parent working units are moved to the COVID area in turns to relieve them of the work pressure. Holistic nursing care is rendered pertaining to the demands of the diverse patients.

*Nurses – The Frontline Warriors*

Difficult roads that we take today bring smiles on many people’s faces. Unlike the usual three shifts that the nurses do, COVID wards require overlapping shifts covering 24 hrs, which means that the nurses have to start a shift in odd hours as 12 am and 4am when the entire nation is at rest. This takes away their routines of sleep and food.

Long hours of daily exposure to COVID positive patients have physical and mental health impacts on the health care workers[^9]. SRM has given the greatest...
privilege to nurses by exceptionally allowing them to work a minimal of only four hour shift donning the personal protective equipment.

Owing to the strenuous and unique COVID work process, there was pandemonium in sustaining continuity of work. Process flows were designed to follow mandatory measures that ensured uninterrupted patient care. Duty rosters are planned well ahead of time and a list of staff assignment for the next day is scheduled the previous day for effective patient care. The work checklists have promoted smooth functioning of the units without flaws. Nurses documentation is digitalized through Hospital Information system.

It isn’t a bed of roses to don & doff the PPE kit! It takes a lot of effort to learn and practice. After the tiresome work by donning PPEs, our nurses are offered packed food and refreshments before they pursue documentation. In view of the atypical shift timings, all COVID nurses are asked to stay in hostel for their convenience. This has triggered home sickness and desolation in many of the nurses. Keeping this in mind, weekly stress buster activities are planned to cheer them up. In addition, update sessions on COVID 19 have been incorporated in the CNE.

Initially we faced a lot of issues in meeting the demands of patients. The Nursing patient care coordinator backed us to combat their grievances. Efficient reporting system has facilitated us to promulgate and redress the deficiencies.

_A feel at home in SRM_

We are proud to say that none of our COVID nurses were infected with the virus! Our management has taken bounteous leaps in taking care of us. The provisions of kabasura kudineer, breakfast and lunch for all employees on duty are some of the effective steps taken. A kit with vitamins and zinc was issued to all employees in
the hospital. In the initial days, a psychologist was allotted to listen to their feelings and counsel the nurses as they were anxious. Emotional & spiritual support is also given when required. A 3 ply surgical facemask is provided daily to all without fail. Free transport facilities are provided to all personnel. Employees who are identified with suspicious signs or exhibiting symptoms are quarantined or permitted to work based on an approved-criterion that has been set by the hospital infection control team. Swab test is taken free of cost for symptomatic staff. As part of staff welfare, monetary remuneration for all nurses working in COVID area is given to motivate our nurses.

**Hospital Infection Control Nurses- The busy bees**

Our infection control nurses are busy as bees in making rounds to maintain strict infection control precautions throughout the hospital premises. Maintaining records and ensuring the adherence of protocols are important tasks. Social distancing is meticulously adhered. Routine fumigation is done throughout the hospital. ‘Wash hands’ is the mantra that is reminded every 2 hrs through the public addressing system.

**Our patient’s view**

Our patients are engaged through valuable TV programs inside the wards. They express that they had fear and anxiety on their first day of admission in the ward. A few of them had sleepless nights too. However, they get accustomed to and had a comfortable stay with us in SRM. Despite of their despair, many have appreciated our beloved nurses for their compassion, commitment and dedication towards COVID patients.
A new venture- The Covaxine clinical trials

Among the 12 institutions that are chosen nationwide, SRM is the only medical institution from the State that is privileged to embark the illustrious venture of Covaxine clinical trials. Volunteers are prudently scrutinized and enrolled in the trial. This historic endeavor has successfully advanced to the third phase.

Eventually…

We appreciate the hard times which has boosted our inner strength. We have learnt to look for rainbows in the rain and encounter the new normal days that are ahead of us.

References:


infected-says-who.html


15. The world remade from Covid-19 scenarios for resilient leaders, Deloitte. Retrieved from