

Care home nurses still need support to recover from COVID trauma, research shows

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Those on the front line of the COVID pandemic need mental health support to help them recover from—or manage—the stress and trauma they faced, according to University of East Anglia research.

A new report published today investigates the impact of the [pandemic](#) on nurses working in [care homes](#). It shows how care home nurses were unprepared for the situation they found themselves in, and that this impacted their [mental health](#) and well-being.

"Care-home Nurses' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: Managing ethical conundrums at personal cost: A qualitative study" is published in the *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* on December 6, 2022.

The research team says that these frontline workers need a mental [health](#) and well-being strategy to help promote recovery from the symptoms of [trauma](#) and moral distress that they faced during the pandemic.

Lead researcher Diane Bunn, from UEA's School of Health Sciences, said, "Our work shows that care home nurses were completely unprepared for the extraordinary situation they found themselves in during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that this has impacted their mental health and well-being. They had to manage a highly infectious new disease, associated with high mortality, in residents already living with complex clinical conditions. They did this alongside staff shortages, constantly changing and conflicting guidelines and with minimal external professional support."

"Health and social care staff are still very much in a recovery phase. They need time to recover from all that happened during the pandemic and many of them will need counseling and mental health support for some time. Supporting care home nurses to recover from the pandemic is essential to maintain a healthy, stable workforce," Bunn continued.

The research team carried out in-depth interviews with care home nurses about their experiences of the pandemic, across homes for [older people](#) in England and Scotland. They particularly focused on the nurses' resilience and mental well-being.

"All of the nurses we spoke to described being attentive to the needs of others, but less attentive to their own needs, which came at personal cost," said Bunn. "There are many lessons to be learnt to support their recovery and ensure appropriate policies are in place in preparedness for the next pandemic."

The study highlights a range of strategies to help nurses accept and recover from their experiences, and suggestions for how to better-prepare for future pandemics. These include:

- Bespoke mental health and well-being strategy for care home nurses in the current pandemic recovery period and ensuring that this is ongoing and adaptable for future pandemics and disasters.
- Wider professional and government recognition of the specialist skills required of care home nurses.
- Revisiting guidance to better prepare for any future pandemics and disasters on care homes
- Involvement of care home nurses in the development of disaster-response policies in care homes.
- Consistency of guidelines, and research-informed methods for effective communication of guidelines.

"Support for care home [nurses](#) will likely benefit other care-home workers either directly through wider roll-out, or indirectly through improved well-being of [nurse](#) leaders," added Bunn.

More information: 'Care-home Nurses' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: Managing ethical conundrums at personal cost: A qualitative study', *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/jnu.12855](https://doi.org/10.1111/jnu.12855)

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