

New survey shows links between COVID-19 pandemic and B.C. nurses' mental health

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B.C. nurses working in the front lines at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced high levels of emotional exhaustion, depression and anxiety, finds a new survey by UBC nursing researchers and the BC Nurses' Union (BCNU).

Three out of five nurses surveyed, or 60 percent, reported emotional exhaustion, compared with 56 percent from a similar survey conducted in late 2019. Forty-one percent suffered from depression—up from 31 percent earlier. And 38 percent of nurses said they experienced anxiety, compared to 28 percent last year.

The findings also show the toll exacted by COVID-19 on nurses' personal lives, with 86 percent reporting they are extremely concerned about bringing the virus home and 80 percent fearing they will contract COVID-19 at work.

A total of 3,676 nurses across B.C. participated in the study, conducted in June and July 2020.

"While these are preliminary findings and we are continuing to analyze the data, we can already see

the broad trends of worsening [mental health](#) among B.C.'s frontline nurses," said principal investigator Farinaz Havaei, an assistant professor at the UBC school of nursing who studies [health systems](#) and [patient care](#).

"As a [nurse](#) and a researcher, I'm very concerned to see more nurses reporting higher levels of poor mental health, which can directly affect their ability to provide effective care, if not resolved in a timely manner."

The researchers say the survey findings also point to challenges with the pandemic response early on. Two out of five nurses (41 percent) rated the transparency of organizational decisions related to the pandemic as poor or failing. Three out of 10 (27 percent) said COVID-19 related protocols and policies changed daily, if not multiple times a day.

"Before the pandemic, nurses were being greatly impacted by the nursing shortage and burnout due to high workloads," says BCNU President Christine Sorensen. "This study offers a look at the personal and professional sacrifices nurses have made over the last six months. It highlights the mental health challenges facing nurses and all health-care workers as they brace for a COVID-19 surge this fall."

The key findings are based on responses from nurses in acute care, community care and long-term care. The survey also looked at nurses' COVID-19 training, workplace violence and nurses' coping mechanisms.

More information: The survey results are available online: news.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/port-2020_09_28.pdf

Provided by University of British Columbia

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