



# Ethical Dilemmas Facing Nurses During the Coronavirus Crisis: Addressing Moral Distress

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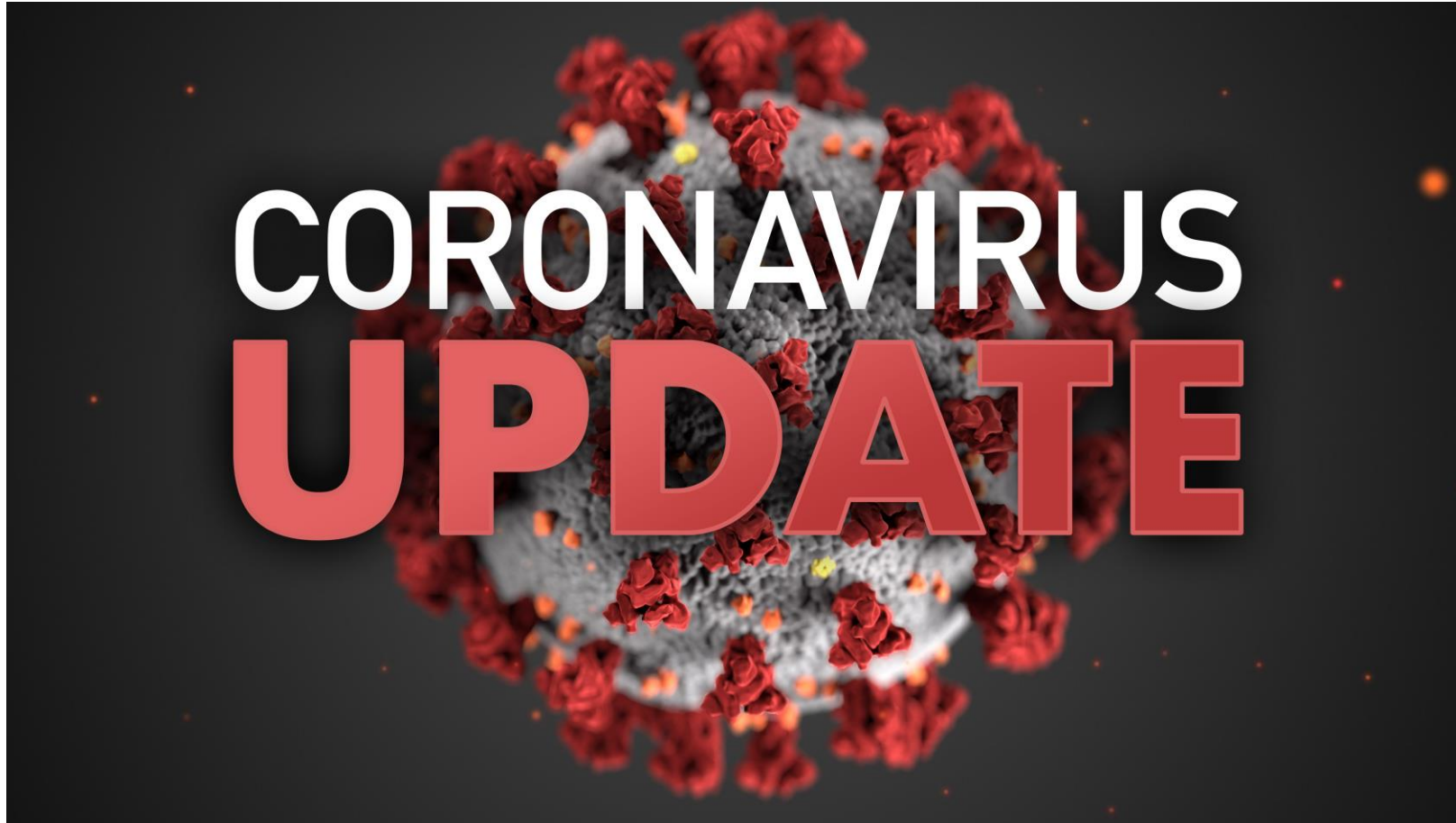
# A Moment of Gratitude



# Objectives

1. Describe the current evidence regarding the COVID-19 virus
2. Discuss ethical dilemmas facing nurses caring for patients seriously ill with COVID-19 and their families
3. Identify strategies to address the dilemmas facing nursing in this unprecedented crisis
4. Discuss self-care strategies to support nurses dealing with moral distress associated with the crisis

Where are we today with the Coronavirus?



# Keep Up-To-Date with Evidence-Based Resources

- Coronavirus.gov- latest updates & FAQ
- USA.gov- provides data on federal government responses
- CDC.gov/coronavirus- public health & safety information
- ANA- <https://nursingworld.org/coronavirus>
- Sigma- <https://www.sigmanursing.org>
- AACN- <https://www.aacnnursing.org>

# Covid-19



- Global Epidemic
- Spread is thought to be through aerosolized droplets expelled from coughing, sneezing, or breathing
- Incubation period is 2-14 days
- Symptoms typically are fever, cough & shortness of breath- can be spread in the absence of symptoms
- Lives on plastic & metal for up to 72 hours
- Risk is greater in older aged adults and those with co-morbidities

[CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

# Best Practices for Prevention & Mitigation

- Recommendations/Restrictions for all: strict hand hygiene, surface decontamination; social distancing of 2m or 6 feet; no more than 10 people in a group;
- Healthcare system recommendations: Patients presenting with symptoms- facemask on arrival; rapid triage; separate in well-ventilated space with 6 ft distance until isolation room available
- Recommendations for healthcare workers in contact with infected individuals: strict hand hygiene, surface decontamination; PPE: gown, gloves & N95 respirator plus a face shield/goggles or a powered, air-purifying respirator (PAPR)

Adams & Walls; *JAMA*, 3.12.20; [CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

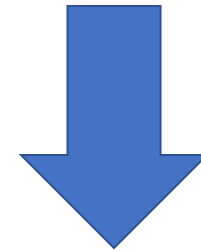


# Current Statistics

Date	Location	Infected	Deceased	% Mortality
3/23/20	Global	351,083	15,337	.04%
3/22/20	Italy	59,138	5,476	.14%
3/22/20	US	35,075	458	.01%

# What Do We Know About Dealing with A Pandemic?

- **We have an obligation to provide good symptom management to all**
  - Some may be denied potentially life-saving therapies in a triage system
  - Families may lose the opportunity to be involved in decision-making
  - Patients may be forced to die alone
- **A pandemic stresses the frontline healthcare workers**
  - Workers are often asked to work in unfamiliar areas
  - Workloads exceed normal limits
  - Resources & supplies are limited



**Burnout & PTSD**

# Ethical Issues Facing Nurses & Healthcare Professionals

- **Protection of the public from harm-** respect & educate about social distancing
- **Proportionality-** medications, PPE, equipment and beds must not be "hoarded" within the community
- **Duty to provide care-** balancing obligations to protect our own health and our families with that of our professional duties
- **Equity-** patients not expected to survive still need care!
- **Trust-** communicate honestly & make decisions transparent; remember, nurses are the most trusted profession (Gallup poll, 2020)

Downar & Seccareccia, 2010

# Develop a Plan to Address these Ethical Issues

- **Non-maleficence: Protect the public**- Respect, role model and educate about social distancing; Follow CDC guidelines
- **Justice: Proportionality**- avoid hoarding mentality; develop creative solutions to the concerns about the shortage of PPE
  - Snorkel masks
  - Call on painters, contractors, rail workers to donate particulate filtering masks
  - Call on vets, dentists to donate N95 masks
  - Consider sterilization using ethylene oxide (takes 12 hrs.)
  - Consider decontamination with UV germicidal irradiation
  - Wear surgical masks over N95 respirators to conserve but prevent droplet contamination
  - Place infusion pumps outside rooms with extension cords to limit room entry

Dewey et al., *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 3.20.2020

# Develop a Plan to Address these Ethical Issues

- **Beneficence: Duty to Provide Care**- Balance professional duty with own health & family's well-being; Cannot care for others if you don't take care of yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually
- Consider staff at increased risk and limit their exposure. In China- an estimated 3000 healthcare workers have been infected and 22 have died
- **Beneficence: Equity**- Call on palliative care teams to support those critically ill, especially those not expected to live. We need a plan to care for those dying not just those we are trying to save!
  - Mortality Data from China- 0.5%-4% in all infected  
5%-15% of those needing hospitalization  
22% - 62% critically ill

Adams & Walls, 3.12.2020

# Compassion Fatigue/Burnout & Moral Distress

During the coronavirus crisis, nurses will

- witness triaging of equipment to those who have a chance to live
- witness patients dying without family able to be with them due to visitor restrictions
- experience cumulative loss
- suffer from exhaustion due to work load and schedule changes
- struggle with the worry about their own health and exposure to family while balancing professional obligation
- witness the angst over limited medical supplies, equipment, hospital beds and PPE

# Is it Compassion Fatigue or Burnout?

- Compassion Fatigue: Physical, emotional, and spiritual result of chronic and continuous self-sacrifice and/or prolonged exposure to difficult situations
  - Difficult and unable to love, nurture, care for, or empathize with another's suffering
- Burnout: Physical and psychological, with a decrease in loss of motivation. Triggered by:
  - More workplace demands
  - Lack of resources,
  - Interpersonal stressors
  - Organizational policies that can lead to diminished caring, cynicism, and ineffectiveness

Kravits, 2019

# Moral Distress

- Moral distress is the result of having to act in a way that is in opposition with our own values & beliefs
  - Unrelieved pain or suffering
  - Inefficient healthcare systems
  - Limited availability of equipment, ICU and hospital beds, staff & hospice care during the crisis



# Moral Resilience

- Increasing literature on the importance of moral resilience – especially in nursing
- The ability to be “buoyant in adverse circumstances”
- Described as:
  - A sense that life is meaningful under every circumstance
  - Ability to manage moral stressors

ELNEC Critical Care Curriculum; Rushton, 2016

# Ways to Start Cultivating Moral Resilience

- Foster self-awareness
- Develop self-regulatory capacities
- Develop ethical competence
- Speak up with clarity and confidence
- Find meaning in the midst of despair
- Engage with others
- Participate in transformational learning
- Contribute to a culture of ethical practice



# What Can I Do if I am Struggling? Lead the Way!

- Utilize your employee health counselors for personal support
- Consult with ethics committee members to debrief about ethical issues that are taking a toll on you and your colleagues
- Encourage discussions around staffing fairness to limit the workload stress
- Find ways to celebrate success and joy- even in the midst of this pandemic there are always joys to be found!
- Access resources like our own ANA for tools and strategies to help if you are experiencing incivility, bullying, or workplace violence that may see a rise in the midst of the pandemic stressors
- Seek facts and education needed during this time- ELNEC online may be helpful for those of you needing primary palliative care education

# Other Strategies To Address Compassion Fatigue/Burnout/ Moral Distress

- Consider appointing a wellness champion on your unit, in your clinic or on your team
- Take a moment at the start of each day to gather (6 feet apart) with a prayer, special saying, or word of the day that can bring everyone together even though we have to stay physically apart
- Nutritious food is always helpful- remember, eating is a social expression of caring in our culture- consider single package items that everyone can enjoy
- Make sure you and colleagues are taking much needed breaks during your busy shifts!!!

# The Pause



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= HVXM2YhZ2A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVXM2YhZ2A)

# Protecting Yourself Through This Crisis: Be a Leader!

- Maintain positive, pro-active self-care
  - Balanced, healthy nutrition
  - Realistic exercise plan
  - Quality sleep
  - Engage in activities that bring give you meaning
- Pay attention to your body's signals & respond to needs
- Create positive emotions:
  - At the end of the day write down 3 things that went well during the day & an affirmation (an intention, "I" statement using action-oriented verbs)
  - Find and express gratitude

# Stay Safe and Healthy

- Mental health is as important as physical health- being “cooped up” can be difficult
- In this time of “social distancing”
  - Utilize technology to stay connected to family and friends
  - Reach out to elders or others in need in your neighborhood
  - Consider meeting with a group of friends on “zoom” or other facetime for a book club or knitting group
  - Substitute gym time with videos online
  - Access church services or prayer groups online
  - **Take advantage of the outdoors - soak up the beginning of spring**
    - Have you ever really watched the trees bloom?



# Let's Take a Moment Together

Put down your pen, if you have been taking notes;  
Center your body in your chair;  
Close your eyes while we do a brief relaxation exercise together!

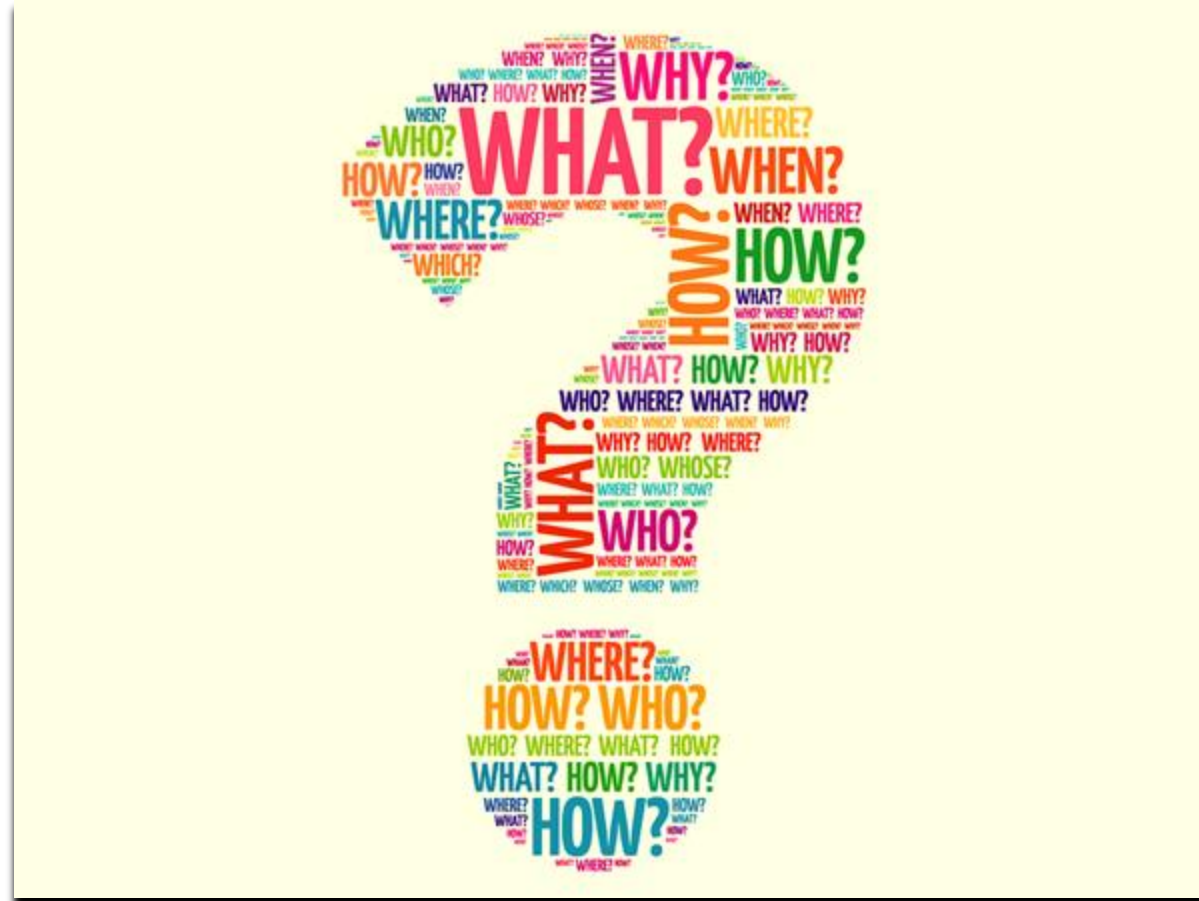




**Thank You For ALL You are Doing for Your  
Patients, Families, and Communities!**



# Questions & Discussion



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