Creating Healthy Work Environments VIRTUAL 2021

Evidence-Based Quality Improvement Strategies to Reduce Nursing Burnout During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Purpose:** Burnout among nurses is a problem that jeopardizes the provision of safe patient care. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has increased the burnout rates experienced by frontline nurses (Hu et al., 2020). The purpose of the proposed evidence-based quality improvement project was to identify the causes of burnout among nurses as documented by the literature, and to provide strategies to reduce burnout using quality improvement tools aimed at promoting healthier work environments. The 5A’s of evidence-based practice (ask, acquire, appraise, apply, assess) aligned to QSEN competencies served as a framework for this project.

**Methods:** After conducting a comprehensive literature search, pertinent research studies included in this project were rated using Melnyk & Overholt-Fineout’s levels of evidence. The literature revealed that nurses who suffer from burnout experience emotional exhaustion, fatigue, sleep disturbances, depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment (Barello et al., 2020). Recent studies found even higher rates of burnout associated with working in the COVID-19 frontline, with nurses reporting high levels of fear, anxiety, depression (Fernandez et al., 2020); demoralization (Allen & Cug, 2020); and increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (Barello et al., 2020). This leads to impaired clinical judgement, resulting in decreased attention to the patient’s condition and a compromised ability to problem solve (Chang et al., 2017).

Based on literature findings, the authors used the 5-whys root cause methodology to synthesize sources of burnout. A Fishbone Diagram clustered these burnout contributors under the following categories: people, policies, training, management, stressful situations, and lack of support. Given the known moderating power of job satisfaction on burnout (Sabei et al., 2019), a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle was created to address contributors under organizational purview, such as understaffing, high patient-to-nurse ratios, inadequate orientation, high turnover rates, ineffective leadership, and lack of teamwork (Sasso et al., 2018; Van Bogaert et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2019).

**Results:** Evidence-based interventions to reduce burnout were identified, including: Reducing social stigma around COVID-19 patients; providing a proper orientation, including nurse residency programs for novices; ensuring an adequate staffing mix;
requiring breaks; promoting self-care strategies, psychosocial support, and strategies to increase resilience; improving teamwork and interprofessional communication; and fostering shared governance for collaborative decision-making (Blake et al., 2020). To evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed evidence-based strategies and the PDSA cycle, the authors suggested monitoring of nurses’ self-reported levels of burnout using pre- and post- surveys, and monitoring nursing units call offs and retention rates.

**Conclusion:** Future recommendations for nursing practice include providing education about burnout warning signs to healthcare workers; encouraging healthy habits and self-care strategies; reducing the amount of voluntary or mandatory overtime; advocating for safe staffing and work conditions; and fostering a sense of positivity and ownership to build resilience in the workplace.

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**Title:**
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**Keywords:**
Burnout, COVID-19 Pandemic and Quality improvement

**Abstract Summary:**
The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the burnout rates experienced by nurses. This project used an evidence-based quality improvement approach to promote patient safety and increase professional well-being. A cause-and-effect diagram and PDSA cycle provided evidence-based implementation and evaluation strategies aimed at reducing burnout and fostering healthier work environments.

**References:**


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Author Summary: Mary Selvaggi volunteered in Uganda and fundraised for Children's Miracle Networks while obtaining her BSN from Saint Mary's College. Her passion for this project stemmed from becoming an RN among the COVID-19 Pandemic. She wished to learn self-care and coping strategies to build self-resilience on her Cardiac Medical Surgical Unit at Norton Brownsboro Hospital. Mary wishes to implement these strategies to help reduce burnout among the nursing profession and provide quality care to her patients.

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