

The Experience of Nurses Working with Older Adults During the Covid-19 Pandemic



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Background

As of October 1, 2021, over 1.6 million Canadians have contracted Covid-19, with adults over the age of 60 representing a disproportionately high 16.5% of all cases. Canadians over 60 account for 62% of those hospitalized, 58.6% of those admitted to the ICU, and 93.7% of Covid-19 related deaths (Government of Canada, 2021). Due to the increased vulnerability of older adults toward Covid-19, nurses working in long-term care and acute care have had to adapt to increasingly challenging circumstances.

Methods

Three existing studies were subjected to a secondary thematic analysis.
Study 1: Early experiences for Saskatchewan nurses.
Study 2: Canadian nurses experiences in 2021.
Study 3: Clinical educators in nursing.

Results

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, nurses caring for older adults have been subjected to increasingly challenging working conditions. This analysis has identified three major themes concerning the unique ethical dilemmas nurses caring for older adults have encountered, and the creative problem solving employed to reduce the impact.

“We have no family that can come in, no visitors of any kind. We've had to change the way we do things as far as communicating with families and trying to offer them opportunities to either FaceTime or speak on the phone to their loved ones.”

Decreased Quality of Life

Due to protocols intended to protect the wellbeing of older adults such as visitor restrictions and social isolation, older adults have lost much of their independence and decision-making ability. This has further resulted in loneliness and physical and mental decline.

“I think a lot of them are getting that feeling like they are expendable.”

Older Adults as Lower Priority Citizens

Nurses felt that many of the newly instated Covid-19 protocols did not prioritize the wellbeing of older adults which, in many circumstances, has led to reduced access to healthcare services.

“I am hoping I am safe and pray that I will not infect anybody. I don't completely trust anything anymore as I had tried my best and became sick and passed it on after all of the precautions I used.”

I Cannot Wash my Hands Enough

Nurses working with vulnerable populations experienced an increased fear of being responsible for a Covid-19 outbreak, and many felt that the preventative measures such as hand-washing and PPE were insufficient.

Conclusion

Nursing older adults during the Covid-19 pandemic has been challenging. Policies and procedures need to reflect the unique needs of older adults during this and future pandemics. Nurses play an essential role in improving the quality of life, advocating, and preventing the transmission of Covid-19 in older adults.

