

Abstract

Background: The Covid-19 pandemic has brought rapid changes, increased stress, and ethical challenges to nurses across the country. These factors place nurses at increased risk for developing moral distress. This stress can also increase nurse vulnerability to substance use. There is very little evidence about the rates of moral distress and substance use disorder among nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local Problem: The total number of COVID-19 diagnosis for Rockingham County and Harrisonburg City is 10, 440. Hospitalized patients total 411 and deaths are 125. The local community hospital provides care well beyond the immediate city and county, causing the COVID-19 impact to be greater than immediate local numbers suggest. *Objective:* The primary objective of this evidence-based project is to describe levels of moral distress and substance use disorder among nurses in a community hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic and to make recommendations for interventions to improve nurse wellbeing and patient safety based on findings. An additional aim will be pursued as a follow-up study after graduation.

Methods and Interventions: An online survey, consisting of demographic questions, the Measure of Moral Distress in Healthcare Professional, the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Tool, the Drug Use Screening Tool-10, and a single item asking about amount of time caring for COVID-9 patients will be sent to inpatient and emergency department nurses working at a rural, community hospital. Frequency statistics, measures of central tendency, and charts will be used to describe the rates of moral distress, and substance use disorder risk for alcohol and drugs, and time spent caring for patients with COVID-19. As a proposed step after graduation, the relationship among care of COVID- 19 patients, moral distress, and substance use disorder will be assessed using regression methods for nurses.

Results: Expected findings are rates of moral distress and substance use disorder among nurses in a local agency. Results are expected to be sufficiently representative and detailed that the researcher will be able to make recommendations to the community hospital.

Conclusion/Implications: Recommendations for interventions will be made to the community hospital based on the proposed assessment. These interventions will affect the quality of patient care. At this time the community hospital is unable to commit to implementing an intervention as a result of ongoing emergency protocols due to COVID- 19. Given the literature on the crescendo effect of moral distress and the nature of substance use disorder the lasting effects to nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic will be important to the profession for years to come.