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## COVID-19 CHALLENGES TO EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT NURSES

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**Abstract:** COVID 19 pandemic has impacted all the elements of the healthcare systems. One of the most affected are the emergency departments of the hospitals that have to identify, triage and isolate COVID 19 symptomatic and suspected patients. These have to be done without jeopardizing the routine extremely stressful lifesaving activities to patients in emergencies not related to the ongoing pandemic.

In order to respond to the novel requirements nurses into the emergency departments have to perform several additional duties.

The objective of this study is to analyze the additional duties performed by the nurses into the emergency departments in response to the COVID 19 challenges.

**Materials and Methods** By the means of the descriptive method the new COVID 19 pandemic related challenges are summarized based on the clinical reports and published articles. Comparative method is applied for matching the requirements to the activities performed at Emergency department of the University Hospital "St. George" Plovdiv, by the nurses focused on the COVID 19 pandemic emergency medical structure management.

**Results and discussion** Based on the results obtained through the performed analyses five groups of newly established nursing activities are presented.

The most significant are the required additional activities related to the communication. The nurses are playing central role into the crisis communication. They have to acquire and implement skills for transferring the medical doctors referrals to the patients, to the population at risk regarding what they have to do and what not to do in order to recover or not to become infected.

Nurses into the departments have to communicate into comprehensive manner the requirements regarding the identification of the hazards and required preventive measures to be implemented by the medics, in order their safety and security to be assured.

The increased demands and restricted time for patients management, because of the increased patients influx into emergency departments limit the possibility of communication between the medical doctors during the shifts, therefore, the nurses are requested to be the link between the different working posts.

Pivotal is the role of the nurses into the vaccination campaign as well - not only into administration of the vaccines but and for comprehensively explaining the benefits of vaccines and addressing the population concerns regarding the possible side, undesired effects.

**Keywords:** COVID 19, Emergency department, Nursing, Crisis communication

### 1. INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 pandemic has impacted all the elements of the healthcare systems. From the community based prehospital care, through the dental care till the mostly well-known hospital treatment of the infected a serious disturbance is recorded. (1, 2) One of the most affected are the emergency departments of the hospitals that have to identify, triage and isolate COVID 19 symptomatic and suspected patients. These have to be done without jeopardizing the routine extremely stressful lifesaving activities to patients in emergencies not related to the ongoing pandemic. A lot of articles have been published recently regarding the psychological impact of the COVID 19 on Emergency departments medical staff, the nurses in particular. A lot of factors that are associated with an array of recorded psychological negative consequences are described based on several studies. (3-6) Several studies are focusing on the symptoms that are most frequently reported describing the psychological impact of the corona virus pandemic on the nurses working at the frontline of the hospital care. (7, 8)

The studies performed and articles published on the other aspects of the COVID 19 effects on the nursing activities are relatively modest in comparison to the psychological impact. (9-11)

Other publications are presenting the results of the measures implemented for addressing the pandemic consequences - from enhancing the nurses preparedness for activities throughout the pandemic (12) through underlying the need of implementation of additional safety measures and mental care to the tribute for their devotion into saving patients lives and preserving their health under the threat to become infected. (13-15)

Analyzing the published result of studies and articles describing the gained experience (16) it is easily to conclude that majority of the noted shortfalls could be mitigated through timely, up-to-date, constant and comprehensive communication. (17) As this communication is performed during the extraordinary situation, due to the virus spreading and pandemic development, the current situation could be classified and as a crisis, the medical communication has to be planned, organized and performed in accordance to the crisis communication requirements, guidance and rules. The increased demands towards the emergency department medical staff related to the infectious control requirements added to the routine overcrowded by patients department management are posing new challenges that have to be responded.

In order to respond to the novel requirements nurses into the emergency departments have to perform several additional duties related to the communications needs.

**The objective** of this study is to analyze the additional duties performed by the nurses into the emergency departments in response to the COVID 19 challenges.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

By the means of the descriptive method the new COVID 19 pandemic related challenges are summarized based on the clinical reports and published articles. A survey among the emergency department staff was performed between 01 and 20 June 2021. The medical doctors, nurses and sanitary assistants, stretcher bearers were asked to share with the managers their perception regarding the novel tasks and organization of the workflow imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic. Entire emergency department personnel (n=56) participated into the survey. Comparative method is applied for matching the requirements to the activities performed at Emergency department of the University Hospital "St. George" Plovdiv, by the nurses focused on the COVID 19 pandemic emergency medical structure management.

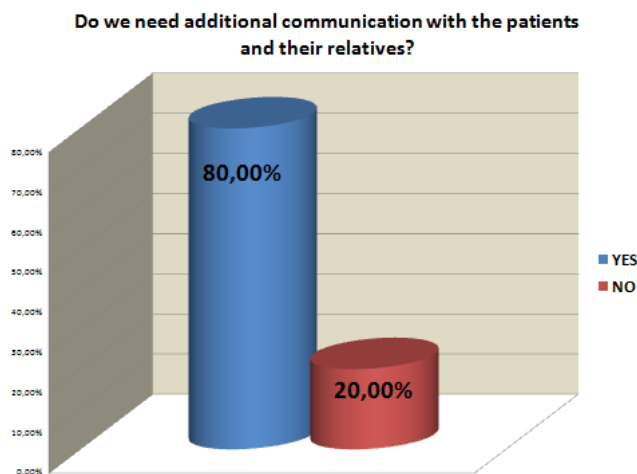
## 3. RESULTS

Medical specialists were asked to answer to the following questions related to the enhanced communication requirements regarding the COVID 19 pandemic management that have to be performed into the emergency department - table 1:

*Table 1*

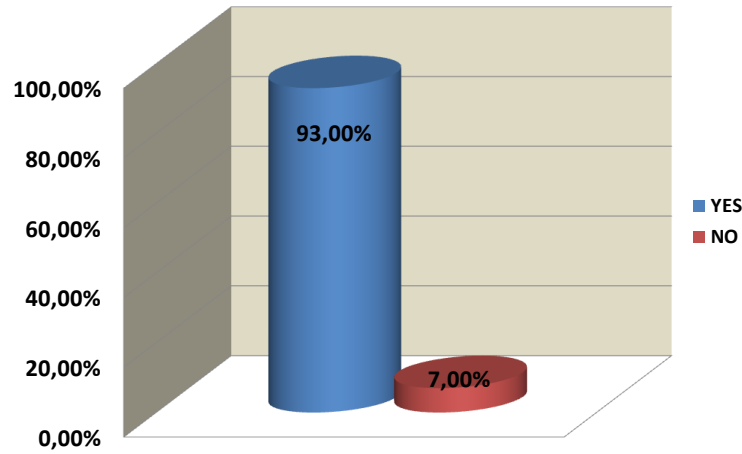
	Question
1	Do we need additional communication with the patients and their relatives?
2	Do we need additional communication among medical staff?
3	Do we need additional communication regarding the personal protective measures?
4	Do we need additional communication regarding the vaccination?
5	Who is the most appropriate to be in charge with the novel communication demands?

The results respondents have given to the questions are presented into the following diagrams (diagram1-3):



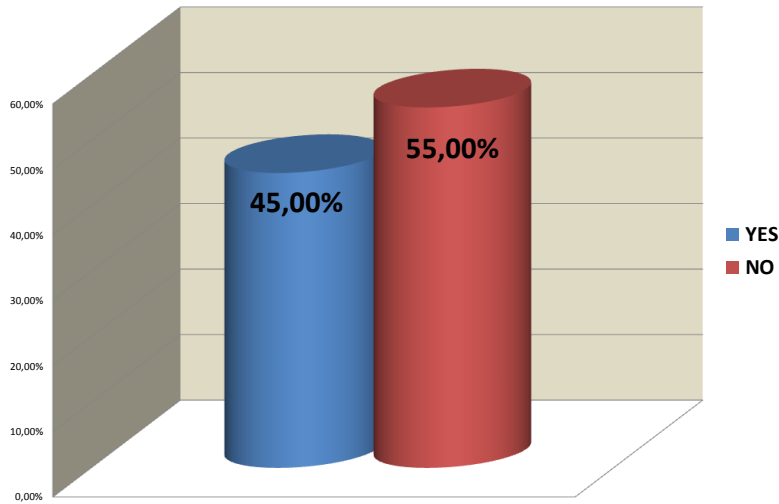
**Diagram 1**

**Do we need additional communication  
among medical staff?**



**Diagram 2**

**Do we need additional communication regarding  
the personal protective measures?**



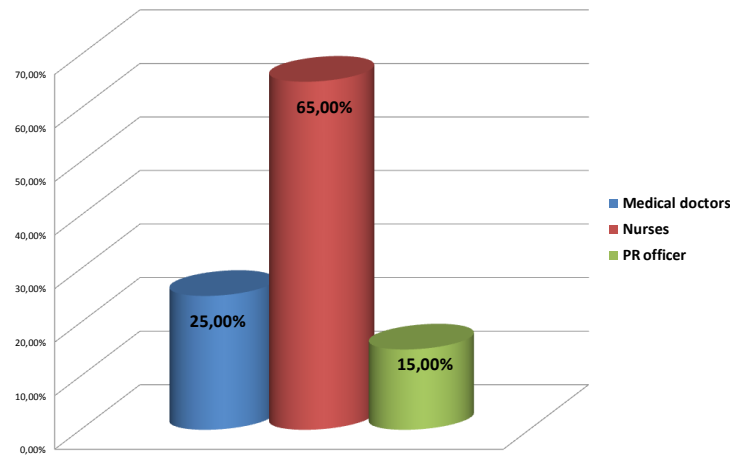
**Diagram 3**

All the participants (100) gave positive answer to the need of additional information regarding the vaccines - types, pharmacology, protective efficacy, side effects, possible undesired effects, what is the mechanism of assuring the protection and from what exactly the vaccinated person is protected - to be infected or only to decrease the severity of the disease.

All these communication shortages highlighted by the emergency department medics are depicting significant medical planning shortfalls that have to be addressed via adaptation of the department contingency plan.

The fifth question is asking the department personnel regarding who is the most appropriate to fulfill these communication gaps. The results of the received answers is presented at the diagram 4.

**Who is the most appropriate to be in charge  
with the novel communication demands?**



**Diagram 4**

The result clearly are defining the nurses as the medical specialists that could become the source of reliable and comprehensively disseminated medical information that is required by the different entities into the COVID 19 pandemic. It is not surprising that the nurses are selected as the most appropriate for fulfilling these tasks, because of the time they are spending with the patients and their relatives. The medical doctors, particularly in the overwhelmed by patients emergency departments, are fully engaged with patients status evaluation and decision-making into the extremely limited timeframe dictated of the patients life threat. In the great majority of the time the medical doctor is to perform re-triage, evaluation, and start life-saving or/and life keeping emergency procedures simultaneously with organizing and directing the activities required for other patient/s management. Other possible explanation for the nurses to be preferred along with the extreme time constrain of the medical doctors is also the language use and the wording of the message that has to be communicated to ordinary citizens and to the medical staff. They require plain, straightforward, comprehensible, short explanation regarding what is the hazard, the risk level associated with the hazard, what has to be and what must not be done in order not to become infected. The sophisticated discussion on the suspected possible pathological processes and about the possible, but still not confirmed levels of protections or undesirable, side effects, could even confused the recipients, instead to support and guide their decisions and activities.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

All findings in our study are describing one new sphere of significant activities to be added to the nursing protocols into emergency departments during the epidemic or pandemic situation. From our initial survey could be concluded that the nurses are playing central role into the crisis communication. They have to acquire and implement skills for transferring the medical doctors referrals to the patients, to the population at risk regarding what they have to do and what not to do in order to recover or not to become infected.

Nurses into the emergency departments have to communicate into comprehensive manner the requirements regarding the identification of the hazards and required preventive measures to be implemented by the medics, in order their safety and security to be assured.

The increased demands and restricted time for patients management, because of the increased patients influx into emergency departments limit the possibility of communication between the medical doctors during the shifts, therefore, the nurses are requested to be the link between the different working posts.

Pivotal is the role of the nurses into the vaccination campaign as well - not only into administration of the vaccines but and for comprehensively explaining the benefits of vaccines and addressing the population concerns regarding the possible side, undesired effects.

For planning the required nurses training regarding these newly spotted tasks related to the crisis medical communication further and more comprehensive research has to be planned and performed.

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