

Pearls for Surviving a Pandemic

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Purpose and Background: Nurses have little recent experience providing care during a pandemic. While the world has experienced previous pandemics (i.e. Ebola), the impacts on healthcare were not as widely experienced in the Northeast United States. The specific aim was to identify pearls (suggestions) to survive a pandemic as a nurse.

Methods: A qualitative, phenomenological design was implemented, and IRB approved. In December of 2020, 9 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, data were collected and managed using a Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap®) formatted confidential survey. The population was any professional nurse (staff nurse, APRN, LPN, nurse educator/nurse leader, travel nurse) working at a rural academic medical center in the Northeast United States. Narrative comments were analyzed using Braun & Clarke's 6 Phases of Summative Concept Analysis. Actions were taken to promote trustworthiness, including creating an audit trail and conducting a member check. Data saturation was noted after reading 50 entries. The use of a confidential electronic survey limited the researchers' ability to probe or clarify comments.

Results: Of the 166 nurses that completed the survey, 134 (80.7%) nurses provided at least one pearl. Of note, 63 (37.6%) nurses had cared for patients that tested positive for COVID-19. Each pearl was categorized by sentiment with 123 reflecting positive sentiment (having proposed a clear suggestion for surviving the pandemic). Four themes evolved from the data:

1. *Take care of yourself and find a balance*
"Rest and recharge when you aren't working... make sure to keep doing something that make you happy so you can feel some sort of refresh before heading back into work."
2. *Teamwork*
"Lean on each other, only your fellow co-workers, work friends and peers truly know what you are going thru. We need each other in order to remain resilient."
3. *Practice safety*
"A pandemic can take a long time to get under control, and there will be many changes in protocol both at the hospital and at the federal level. It is important to follow the research and remain patient with the process. As always, hand hygiene!"
4. *Appreciate that this is a hard time*
"Flexibility is essential. Many things will be unknown, do not allow the fear of the future impede your ability to move forward."

Discussion/Conclusion: As part of taking care of yourself, nurses emphasized the importance of self-care acts, mental health, and time spent outside of work with friends and family. Teamwork had relevance to workload and provided support for the nurses through communication and shared responsibility. Practicing safety is crucial during a pandemic. By appreciating that this is a hard time, it was important to exercise forgiveness and understanding toward self and patients.

Next Steps: Further research is warranted to investigate how useful pearls are for nurses in future pandemics and other crises impacting nurses and how nursing care is provided.