EDITORIAL

Disaster nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic: A collection of new evidence

Given the area of disaster nursing remains deplete of robust evidence required to drive effective and efficient nursing interventions, this special section aimed to present an overview of current disaster nursing evidence to promote excellence in nursing practice, research and education. As the call for papers coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, we also recognised the need for a disaster nursing evidence base to help guide the pivotal role of nurses in health care delivery during this pandemic. Since the emergence of, and ongoing nature of the pandemic, the important role played by nurses has been highlighted. Given that nurses comprise the largest part of the healthcare workforce (Said & Chiang, 2020), undertake most of the infectious disease containment and provide most of the front-line care during pandemics (Usher et al., 2009), the need for evidence to support nurses and to understand their issues and concerns during pandemics is crucial. In addition, the challenges faced by nurses as they carried out these important roles have been immense. For example, not only are they burdened by the increased volume and intensity of their work, but they are also challenged by a constant need to adapt ways of working (Maben & Bridges, 2020). We also know that nurses are at risk of burnout (Zhang et al., 2020), compassion fatigue (Alharbi et al., 2020), emotional/psychosocial exhaustion (Maben & Bridges, 2020) and issues related to the use and supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) (Fernandez et al., 2020). Nurses have also expressed concern about treating infectious patients, the risk of infecting family members (Fernandez et al., 2020) and stigma associated with their work (Chiang et al., 2007).

While it is not surprising that most of the articles submitted for the special section relate to the COVID-19 pandemic, all provide important updates and insight related to disaster nursing. The collection of papers provides an interesting and informative compilation of the currently available evidence in the area. This evidence will help front-line nurses in the delivery of healthcare to the many who continue to be impacted by COVID-19 and other disasters, and provide important information for managing future disasters. The papers also offer important insights for those in management responsible for staffing hospitals and other services, as well as those responsible for ensuring safe working environments for nurses.

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