

findings from a qualitative study examining the multi-level challenges experienced by nursing assistants during the pandemic. Cimarolli examines if quality of employer communication and workers' perceived COVID-19-related preparedness mitigate the impact of work-related stress on NH workers' decision to resign. Franzosa shares recommendations based on priorities identified by nursing assistants and administrators to build future resilience based on lessons learned. Finally, Simpson identifies factors associated with states' decisions to adopt COVID-19 testing mandates for workers in NHs. Dr. Zimmerman discusses study findings and their contributions for creating supportive NH work environments to ensure most optimal NH worker and resident quality of life.

CHALLENGES FACED BY NURSING HOME DIRECT CARE WORKERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A COMPARISON ACROSS CARE SETTINGS

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The COVID-19 pandemic has generated awareness of the value of the direct care workforce to provide care in settings serving those most at risk from the disease. However, few studies have gauged the impact of COVID-19 on this workforce and their pandemic-related challenges. The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and stress experienced by direct care workers (N=1,414) and their perceptions of preparation and quality of employer communication during this health crisis. Nursing home (NH) workers reported separation from family members and understaffing as the top external and work-related challenges. They felt adequately prepared and gave their employers high marks for communicating with them during the pandemic. NH direct care workers were more likely to report increased workload and understaffing as a challenge compared to workers in home and community-based settings. They also experienced a significantly higher number of work-related challenges compared to workers in assisted living.

JOB RESIGNATION IN NURSING HOMES DURING COVID-19: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYER COMMUNICATION AND WORKER PREPAREDNESS

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Although research on factors mitigating the negative impact of strain/stress experienced by nursing home (NH) workers during the pandemic is emerging, there is no research on how COVID-19-related work stress and employer supports influence NH workers decision to resign. The purpose of this study was to investigate if high quality communication related to COVID-19 by the employer – a form of job support - can mitigate the impact of work stress on NH employees (N=1,730) decision to resign by optimizing employees' preparedness to care for residents with COVID-19. Guided by the Job-Demands-Control-Support Model and

employing path analyses, results indicate that higher stress was associated with greater likelihood of resigning, which operated through the paths of communication quality and preparedness. While higher stress was associated with less optimal quality of communication, good quality of communication was associated with more optimal preparedness which was associated with reduced likelihood of leaving one's job.

CHALLENGES REPORTED BY CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANTS DURING COVID-19: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Certified nursing assistants (CNAs) who care for vulnerable nursing home residents faced unprecedented circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While staff and PPE shortages were ubiquitous and widely known, the focus of this qualitative work was to gain a broader understanding of the numerous challenges they faced. We conducted 10 remote focus groups with CNAs at 5 nursing homes (N=56) in downstate New York. Content analysis was conducted, and emerging themes identified. Results showed a myriad of emotional challenges including helplessness, fear and anxiety. Operational challenges focused on lack of COVID testing capacity, information, and consistent guidance and support, in addition to staff and equipment. Individual challenges included personal experience of COVID illness and that of colleagues, and balancing high concurrent demands of work and family. These results are discussed in the context of developing recommendations to promote future safety, skill refinement and enhanced resilience in the workforce moving forward.

IT WAS TRIAL BY FIRE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING A STRONGER NURSING HOME WORKFORCE AFTER COVID-19

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The COVID-19 crisis showed the urgent need for a unified, well-supported nursing home workforce. The objective of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experience of certified nursing assistants (CNAs) and administrators during COVID-19 to identify best practices moving forward. Six administrator interviews and 10 remote focus groups with CNAs at 5 nursing homes (N=56) were examined through directed content analysis. Based on priorities identified by CNAs and administrators, the following practices may be most impactful: 1) ongoing and responsive staff training; 2) transparent, direct, and two-way communication channels; 3) prioritizing hiring permanent staff to avoid shortages and reliance on agency staff; 4) building collaborative staff-management relationships; 5) providing flexible job benefits; 6) providing staff-centered emotional support resources; and 7) appraising COVID-19 innovations. Our