

## Sustaining a Workforce: Reflections on Work from Home and Community Care Nurses Transitioning out of the COVID-19 pandemic

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### The Issue:

- The experience of nurses working in home and community care (HCC) during the COVID-19 pandemic is not well understood.
- Understanding these nurses' experiences may be vital in creating more effective retention strategies in the HCC sector.

### Study Objective:

To describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the experiences and attitudes of nurses working in the home and community care sector.

### Methods:

- Using a qualitative descriptive approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with community nurses at one home care organization in Toronto, ON.
- Thematic analysis was guided by the DEPICT model of collaborative analysis.

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**Results:** Sixteen nurses shared their experiences. The sample was predominately women (94%) representing visible minority groups, with an average age of 46 years. Tenure averaged 15 years.

### Theme 1: Motivations to Work in Home and Community Care

- Nurses were motivated by desirable conditions such as flexibility and stability, and the strong relational impacts of work in this sector.

### Theme 2: Adjusting to Pandemic Working Conditions

- Working conditions became more difficult with unmanageable workload demands, uncertainty, and staffing shortages.
- As the pandemic progressed, nurses felt overworked and undervalued by their employer and the public.

### Theme 3: Self-Preservation After Crisis

- Nurses practiced restorative self-care to combat burnout by reconnecting with their social and workplace support networks where possible.
- Many nurses are reevaluating their relationship to their careers in HCC; half held intentions to leave due to feeling depleted and unsupported.

### Theme 4: Sustaining a Workforce

- Nurses expressed concern about the future of HCC nursing and identified retention-promoting solutions such as better sector preparedness, support, and harmonized wages across health sectors to sustain this workforce through pandemic recovery and ahead of future public health crises.

**Conclusions:** As the Canadian HCC sector continues to be challenged by labour shortages, rebuilding and retaining the nursing workforce will require organizational and system-level interventions that address the root cause of concerns expressed by nurses who wish to practice in a supportive environment, with sufficient staffing, that is sensitive to workload expectations.