

COVID-19 Experiences and Emerging Needs of Nurse Leaders in Home and Community Care

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The Issue:

- Nurse leaders in home care are a critical workplace support for the nurses and personal support workers who provide 97% of publicly-funded home care in Ontario.
- The ways in which the pandemic affected the experiences and needs of these leaders has not been well described.

Study Objective:

Explore the motivations, experiences, and emerging needs of nurse leaders working in home and community care during COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

- Using a qualitative descriptive approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nurse leaders in Toronto, ON.
- Thematic analysis was guided by the DEPICT model of collaborative analysis.

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Results:

Eight nurse leaders who supervised point-of-care nurses or personal support workers shared their experiences. The sample was predominately women (75%) with an average age of 42 years.

Theme 1 – Inspired to Lead

- The professional identities of the nurse leaders were shaped by their deep commitment to nursing practice and improving the healthcare system for both clients and care providers.

Theme 2 – Leadership Challenges During COVID-19

- Leaders experienced burnout and decreased self-efficacy in their roles, related to workload pressures from expanded pandemic responsibilities and the demands of acting as pillars of emotional support for their teams.
- Leaders identified a lack of resources to support their own wellbeing.

Theme 3 – Strategies to Improve Well-being

- Nurse leaders coped using personal self-care strategies such as boundary-setting between personal and work domains and seeking decision-making support from peers and senior leaders.

Theme 4 – Lessons Learned

- Participants reflected that their professional growth through the pandemic reaffirmed their commitment to their roles in home and community care.
- Preparation for future public health crises should include strengthening leadership support structures. Participants identified a need for collegial support, mentorship and outreach from senior leaders.

Conclusions:

Strengthening support for nurse leaders is necessary so that they may thrive in their role and continue to be central sources of support for their teams.