



Synopsis

A model of occupational stress to assess impact of COVID-19 on critical care and redeployed nurses: a mixed-methods study

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research, or similar, and contains language which may offend some readers.

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

This study used a model of occupational stress to explore the experiences of nurses who worked in intensive care during the pandemic and its impact on them and the NHS. The study used: (1) a survey to measure nurses' mental health, characteristics of their job during the pandemic and outcomes important to the NHS and (2) interviews to explore their individual experiences. Survey results were compared to a similar pre-pandemic survey from 2018. The survey involved around a third of all critical care nurses in Scotland and additional nurses in England and Wales.

Compared to 2018, nurses were at six times the risk of psychological distress; a third reported concerning symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Nurses perceived a reduction in care quality and patient safety during the pandemic. Over a quarter of nurses were planning to change jobs in the next year. More favourable organisational outcomes (such as higher job satisfaction and reduced desire to change jobs) were associated with improved learning opportunities, the belief that the organisation was focused on staff well-being and quality of patient care. Interviews with nurses provided illustrative examples of these experiences and support the survey findings.

Dissemination events identified continuing staffing issues and lack of learning and development opportunities as problematic, with nurses concerned about the future delivery of high-quality critical care services. Positive aspects were identified, for example, reduced bureaucratic systems, increased local autonomy and decision-making, and recognition of critical care nurses' skill set. There was a strong sense that NHS culture needs to change to become a more open and caring environment.

The NHS and Government need to consider how to meaningfully improve the critical care workplace. There is a need to continue to monitor staff stress and mental health, offer support to staff to recover, engage nurses in decision-making in relation to their working environment, and promote work environments conducive to building upon individual and team resilience.

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