

# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MEDICAL ICU NURSES CARING FOR COVID-19 PATIENTS IN METRO MANILA

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## BACKGROUND

According to the World Health Organization, “The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.” The coronavirus that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, spread from bats to civet cats to humans that made a significant effect on the affected individuals and nurses who are caring for them (Cyanoski, 2020). On the 30th of January, 2020, the Philippines first recorded case of COVID-19 was reported from a 38-year-old female Chinese national who traveled in the country. And by the 7th of March, 2020, the first confirmed local transmissions were recorded (DOH, 2020; WHO, 2020). Since then, the number of COVID-19 cases in Philippines continue to rise. Due to the rapid increase of COVID-19 pts in the country, Filipino nurses all over the country have been working hard. They have been obligated to care for a high number of patients with high mortality rates in a high-pressure environment as well as to deliver care with strict infection control measures but not always with adequate personal protective equipment. With understaffed, overworked and underpaid hospital workers and few to no equipment, the medical team of various hospitals are having a strenuous time coping and providing care to patients.

In this study, the researchers examined the lived experiences of Medical ICU (MICU) Nurses in COVID-19 hospitals in Metro Manila, who are caring for COVID-19 patients. The nurses who took part in the study are currently working as MICU nurses for at least 3 years in tertiary government hospitals in Metro Manila. This research was conducted from October 2020 and was completed this June 2021.

## OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to describe the lived experiences of MICU nurses caring for the COVID-19 patients, specifically:

- To explore the positive and negative emotions, to recognize and tackle various barriers, stressors and coping mechanisms of MICU nurses caring for patients with COVID-19
- To identify workplace activities that contribute to patient care
- To emphasize motivational factors that helped MICU nurses in adapting to new challenges

## METHODS

### Qualitative Phenomenological Design

### Purposive Sampling Technique

The interviewed informants were 4 Medical ICU nurses with an active PRC license who have had at least 3 years of experience in medical ICU wards. They were currently working full-time in a tertiary government hospitals in Metro Manila and were providing bedside care to COVID-19 positive patients since March 2020.

### Semi-Structured Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on the 4 modes in Sister Callista Roy’s Adaptation Theory: Physiologic - Physical Mode, Self-Concept Group Identity Mode, Role Function Mode, and Interdependence Mode.

### Virtual Interview

The interview was done through the utilization of Google Meets which for 1.5 hours. The interview panel consisted of 3 interviewers and 1 interviewee per interview that was conducted.

### Data Transcription, Analysis and Validation

Bracketing, Transcribing, Verbatim transcription, Intuiting, and Colaizzi’s Method of Data Analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- 1 Modern Day Heroes: Positivity Always Wins**  
*Our nurses are heroes who have given their life to something bigger than oneself. Even though they have faced struggles, nurses still have the opportunity to heal the mind, soul, heart and body of our patients and their families. With the pandemic occurring today, they are working day and night to help patients survive the battle and to save humanity from the unseen enemy which resulted in exhaustion. Nurses used positive thoughts and activities as their coping mechanism that eases up their stress and refueled loss energy.*
- 2 Alamort: Half Dead of Exhaustion**  
*à la mort, a French word, call to death or half-dead of exhaustion. This pandemic has given us stress, fear, burnout, and the feeling of being demoralized and exhausted that prevented us from withdrawing and restoring our self, causing a gradual self-destruction. Nurses deserve to have a better working environment, respect, good strategic plan to manage COVID-19 cases and a break to recover and heal.*
- 3 The Clash of Feelings: Bearing the Burden of Mind and Body**  
*This theme provided insights on how the informants decided to accept the task of being a COVID-19 nurse, the adjustments they have taken in consideration and revelations on what drives them to do what they do despite the risks and dangers of being a COVID-19 Nurse.*
- 4 Enshrouded in Darkness but Remaining Beacons of Light**  
**4.1: MAKING IT THROUGH:** *The informants with their colleagues have felt scared & feared the unknown which enshrouded them in a blanket of darkness; yet despite all of this they have gotten up and made light of the things that surrounded them becoming pillars of strength for one another.*  
**4.2: A SONG TO HEAVEN:** *The informants’ religious beliefs, asking the Lord for safety and guidance for themselves, their families, and the people they care for.*  
**4.3: SEMPER FI:** *Semper Fi is a shortened Latin phrase for “Semper Fidelis” which translates to “Always faithful, Always loyal”. The informants responded that they will always answer to the calling of their duty and serve their country.*
- 5 The Art of Nursing One Page at A Time**  
*Nursing is an art and it requires exclusive devotion. This theme encapsulates the professionalism shown by the informants from their lived experiences in caring for patients with caring for COVID-19. This explored the positive and negative emotions, recognized and tackled various barriers, stressors and coping mechanisms of MICU nurses, and emphasized motivational factors that helped MICU nurses in adapting to new challenges.*
- 6 Integral Bound of Bonds: Synergism of Souls**  
*Integral Bound of Bond means the important relationships of bonds or two or more things. Connection to our friends, families and others help us keep our mental state healthier. The nurses connecting with their patients’ hearts and souls and touching their lives is what makes a difference.*
- 7 The Triangle of Life: To Survive and Live Life**  
*Advocates protection and safety so people will be able to live their lives day by day and continue to move forward. The triangle of life that we speak now in this study is the different methods the MICU nurses use to be able to push through regardless of their situation.*

## EIDETIC REPRESENTATION

### VITA ET PUGNAT

A Latin phrase that translates to “life & struggles” that encompasses the lived experiences of the MICU nurses who have struggled to fight and survive in these trying times. The lamp represents those nurses, a symbol that dates back to the time of the mother of nursing, she who held the lamp in the dark. Much like our informants they have become beacons of light in the darkness. The flame represents the informants’ hope and perseverance. The hands represent their support system or in other words the triangle of their lives, which are their family, friends and God. The overflowing colors represent the informants’ emotions, their fears, anxieties, happiness, etc.



## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that working as a COVID-19 nurse poses an increased risk of being infected with the virus, and in spite of having fears and anxiety of unknowingly contracting and spreading the disease to their loved ones, all of the informants took the challenge of being a COVID-19 nurse for they saw this as an opportunity to learn and enhance their knowledge and skills as a nurse, to serve those in need, and to live by the oath they pledged. It is indeed a challenge for the informants to work away from their loved ones and to work in a new environment with strict isolation and infection protocols. Nevertheless, they found their own ways of coping and adjusting to the new set-up and were able to thrive with the help of their loved ones, colleagues, and God. Lastly, to quote one of our informants, “You will always come back to your calling...Remember that Florence Nightingale... during the Crimean war when people were in their darkest moments of their lives, no hinge of hope. She had this lamp that she used to shed some light on those people during their darkest time. And I think it’s about time that we, the nurses of the new era, to open up our lamps, and shed our lights to our fellow Filipinos as we continue to face this pandemic”.

