

When you need masks for your ears

Fifty days into Coronavirus/COVID-19 lockdown on 15 May 2020 prompted me to reflect on the frontlines personally and professionally as a nursing manager, adding collegial anecdotes.

The World Health Organization notes that half of health workers report mental health support needs during this crisis. Overarching anxiety is common. A dark shadow on days and light into the pineal gland at night, fighting sleep. To lie awake, wonder and worry about your patients, your family and lastly yourself, while imagination writes inflammatory nursing notes in your head.

Health workers describe physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. Healthcare managers are caught in a corona-coaster, in the challenge of their careers. Bombardment of email inboxes, and by television, newspapers, and social media platforms propel us to COVID fatigue, with overwhelming info overload.

Policies, protocols, procedures ooze out of every crevice of world, national and provincial health organisation, compelling us to read, and write new workplace arrangements every time the government health regulations change. A constant mental juggle ensues of scientific facts, fears and daily statistics.

Nurses are the forefront of the fear factor – brave and courageous, carrying lamps into diseased darkness. But not all lights are equal. Some nurses bolted before lockdown. Frantic family pressure pulled them home on inter-provincial public

transport. Inexplicable breaking points reached before the feverish fires started raging.

What makes nurses walk away or stay? We ask ourselves about management styles or non-nursing tasks, and if we built resilience through personal engagement; sincere care about nurses; reassurance with stockpiled personal protective equipment and continuous training?

Staff, like a pile of matches, burnt at the edges when colleagues called it a day, choosing to leave to tough economic realities. Some nurses, now breadwinners, with retrenchments and incomes dwindling back home. Pressure mounts for most nurses, along with the real COVID-19 risk.

Yet we still find nurses who find the time to dance and sing amongst their patients. Renditions of Titanic's song, 'My heart will go on', spiritual songs, as well as African dance beats are done in scrubs in theatre passages, in care centres and in the streets of residential retirement care. Acknowledged on Nurses Day 2020, their lamps shone into the speeches of the Pope, Royal Family and Ministers of health everywhere.

So just for a while, we wish to escape the Corona/COVID content, put masks on our ears and watch our fellow nurses dance on into the International Year of the Nurse.

Guinevere Lourens

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