

Personal and Professional Resilience During COVID-19

Jennifer Gore

Mental Health NSG 328

University of New England

This past year was a year of reflection, growth, community, and resilience. COVID-19 has been an unforeseen event that forced us to completely alter how we go about our day-to-day lives. From the way we shopped, to how we went to work and school, see our family and friends, and much more. This pandemic has shifted every aspect of each of our lives in order to keep ourselves and others safe and healthy. We did this not because we were told, but because most of us saw first hand the grief, sadness and death that it brought into our lives. It was these emotions and these tragedies that powered our nation to push for a safer environment so more people did not have to watch loved ones get sick. It took resilience in making these changes, and was no easy feat. Although this is true, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught me more about compassion, family values, self-reflection, and my community than ever before. Through my personal challenges and experiences, the professional sphere, and the community, I now have a better understanding on what it means and takes to be a nurse.

When the pandemic started and everything started to shut down, including our school, it evoked a feeling that I have never felt before. Everything I knew, and everything that I trusted in this world to be, collapsed. This is not because we had to wear masks, or because toilet paper was running low, but it was because people were dying. People were scared. People were lonely. These were new feelings most of us didn't think we would experperince all at once out of nowhere. Months went by and we began to accept our new reality of living. In the months of quarantine it taught me about compassion for others, self-care, self-efficacy, and above all things, resilience. Although I have always had these traits, the pandemic shaped me to hone into these concepts more than I had before. Seeing the stories on the news of families that were forced to be separated because of their job's or their old age made me have compassion for them,

as I couldn't bear the thought of having to be separated from my family. Seeing the statistics climbing everyday on the toll in deaths, and the people who lost their jobs and couldn't afford to feed their families simply broke my heart. Compassion is something I view as a necessary quality to being a nurse. My compassion grew more than ever this year, and I will take it with me through my career. Self-care and self-efficacy was also something I took for granted until this year. I saw the opportunity to make better choices for myself, to do things that made me happy and to also work hard. At first it was very challenging to take part in self-care and self-efficacy. Sitting at my house day after day and going through the motions was comfortable. It was something that I knew after all of this change, but after a while it got old. I began to get bored, to let myself get into an unhealthy routine, and really didn't take care of myself. Eventually I got to a point where I knew I needed to stop treating the pandemic like a home vacation and start treating it like an opportunity to grow and take care of myself. I think this is an important lesson to take away for nursing as when I get into my career I need to remember to take care of myself and always put my health first. Lastly, this pandemic taught me resilience. As a nurse resilience is the best tool you can have. When things go wrong in your personal life or work life, we need to keep going in the face of adversity in order to do our job effectively and save lives. I personally have experienced a lot of life changing things this past year and after all the hardships, I am more resilient than I ever hoped to be, and proved myself to be strong and capable of anything.

COVID-19 has brought on many debates including the different ways on how we can prevent the spread, health equity, and public health policies. This pandemic inspired more research and thought about people's health concerns than I have seen in a while. Officials have begun to put health care, and access to funds on the forefront of the nations priority list which

goes to show the importance of it all. I think after listening and delving into these discussions on public health, it showed me that nurses have the responsibility to advocate for our patients rights. Leadership wise, we have the responsibility to make sure our community has the access, the knowledge, and the tools to get the health care they deserve. To be a nurse means more than what goes inside the walls of the hospital, but to bring justice to the ones that suffer without health care. Why should a pandemic have to happen for our officials to care about the health and wellbeing of our communities? To be a nurse means to care about the safety and health of people at all times. This means to wear a mask when you are supposed to, social distance, not go to big functions, and to spread awareness and inform others when they are not in compliance. After this pandemic ends, a nurse should still carry the beliefs and motivation to help others when they can. Nurses cannot be complicit to ignorance when it comes to the safety and health of others.

The pandemic has proven that there is a need for community wellness programs for the future. This can include more opportunities of health care for the homeless and impoverished, who cannot afford adequate health care. There should be more programs set in place to promote community health which can combat the diseases and illnesses that some can not afford to treat. COVID-19 has also shown that there should be more relief when it comes to hospital bills. Because of the spreadability of COVID-19 and the packed homeless shelters it has made it extra hard on those who had to get hospitalized and had no way of paying after. We also have to factor in the access to medications in our communities as well. Future leadership opportunities that nurses can get involved in with the community can include setting up hygiene stations at local shelters, or accessible flu shot centers for everyone. We can also set up fundraisers to get basic supplies for families in our communities that can promote health and hygiene. The COVID-19

pandemic has brought to light a lot of the faults in our system, especially when it comes to health care for our communities.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered our lives and brought upon many challenges this past year. I have learned through my personal challenges and experiences, the professional sphere, and through the community, better ways of understanding what it means and takes to be a nurse. Right now, vaccines are rolling out and soon the pandemic will be of the past, but I believe our world will always be permanently changed just from this year alone. We have adapted to new hygiene practices, and socially distancing practices which can hopefully be incorporated into our future. This year has taught me a lot but most importantly it taught me how to think like a nurse when it came to personal values, and community goals of health care.