



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT TO THE INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED NURSES IN THE NORDIC REGION MUST REMAIN A PRIORITY

A study conducted in the United Kingdom last April 2020 revealed that third of critically ill patients are from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. According to the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre (2020), 13.8% of the 2249 critically ill are of Asian background (1). BAME workers have faced a triple whammy of threats during the pandemic crisis (2). The lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and insufficient testing capacity were few of the reasons to the high mortality rates of covid19 patients under the BAME groups (3). The BAME group also perceived a slight worse impact of covid19 pandemic on their physical and mental well-being (3).

The BAME group plays a significant role in the achievement of Universal Health Coverage and Sustainable Development Goals (4). For over a year, the minority group of health workforce acted as frontliners to help combat the effects of covid19. In the Nordic Region, there are already recorded cases of covid19 among Filipino Internationally Educated Nurses (FIENs). In the preliminary results of the research conducted among FIENs survivors from Covid19 revealed that the virus was contracted while nurses were taking good care of covid19 patients (5).

The Filipino Nurses Association in the Nordic Region recommends the following occupational health strategies.

1. Mental Health Support. Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) often experience pressure at the workplace and in the society. These nurses also worry for the family members from their home countries. The pandemic has also added pressure to the normal daily routines and life events which might lead to burnout. Psychological and mental health support must be frequently given.

2. Vaccination. As frontline workers to patient care, Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) are at high-risk of contacting the corona virus even with extreme precaution. Vaccination priorities must be given to them whether in direct or indirect contact with the patients. Nurses with underlying disorders must be assessed carefully before giving the vaccination.

3. Flexible Work Schedule. As nurses are getting burnout, massive resignation among them is the one of greatest fears in the profession. Nurses are the largest group of healthcare providers and contribute to the achievement of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is crucial that organisations act immediately to this phenomenon without uncertainty. Decrease the workload of the nurses and increase the number of staff members present in the shift while improving benefits and proper renumeration.

The Filipino Nurses Association in the Nordic Region urges ministries of health and employers of internationally educated nurses working in the Nordic countries to facilitate the urgent vaccination of these nurses may it be in the primary healthcare services or in the tertiary health facilities. As the employers from the Nordic countries have been recently keen in recruiting Filipino nurses and other IENs to the Nordic region, it is pivotal that these nurses receive proper orientation about infection prevention and control measures abiding the protocols in the country of migration, work environment support and other related activities promoting mental health.

(1) Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre. ICNARC report on COVID-19 in critical care 24 April 2020. <https://www.icnarc.org/Our-Audit/Audits/Cmp/Reports> accessed 25th April 2020.

(2) O'Grady, F., 2020. BME workers have faced "triple whammy" of threats during pandemic, says TUC. [online] Tuc.org.uk. Available at: <<https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/bme-workers-have-faced-triple-whammy-threats-during-pandemic-says-tuc>> [Accessed 17 March 2021].

(3) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/>. 2020. Beyond the Data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities. [online] Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf> [Accessed 17 March 2021].

(4) Cubelo, F (2020). Nursing in the time of Covid19. The World Health Summit Panel Discussion. Berlin, Germany accessed on 24.1.2021 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQyY4zR_9iM&t=973s

(5) Dumo, A., Cubelo, F., Vehviläinen-Julkunen, K., Palaganas, E. (2021). Experiences of Nurse Survivors from Covid19 in the Nordic Region: A Pilot Study. *Preliminary Findings*. University of Eastern Finland.