



Studying the mental health impact of COVID-19 on health care workers

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On Jan. 20, 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Snohomish County, Washington. In the following months, Seattle became an epicenter of an early outbreak of COVID-19 in the U.S. Shortly thereafter, 39 residents of the Life Care Center nursing home would die from complications of the viral infection in a single four-week span.

In the early spring of 2020, clinical research teams from Polyclinic and Everett clinic, both in Washington state, and WellMed, convened an emergency meeting through OptumCare Collaborative for Research and Innovation (OCRI) to design and implement a study to understand the mental health impact of the pandemic on health care workers (HCWs) in the ambulatory setting.

Partnering with Quality Metric, an organization specializing in survey measurements for patient reported outcomes, we designed a study approved by the UHG Institutional Review Board in May 2020. Frontline HCWs then completed an anonymous online survey from June to July 2020.

At the time, there was not much published literature on this topic. China conducted a few studies in the early months of the pandemic, but without adequate critical appraisal and primarily in the hospital setting. To our knowledge, this was one of the first studies done to evaluate mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HCWs in the outpatient setting.

The results showed that female health care workers and younger HCWs had higher levels of anxiety, while older HCWs had lower levels. Interestingly, working in respiratory clinics did not cause role limitations due to emotional health as compared to non-respiratory clinic settings. The greatest stress impact was the uncertainty of when the pandemic would end. This information may be useful in conducting further research to better understand the complex relationships of mental health impacts on work performance and burnout.

HCWs are at the frontlines of the war on this pandemic and continue to pay a heavy price. Supporting their well-being, whether physical, financial or emotional, is essential for their retention. Policies to mitigate mental health stress in health care workers needs to be prioritized by leaders, using evidence-based information from this and other similar studies. Failure to do so may result in disastrous short- and long-term outcomes for the health of our nation.

Read the full text of the study: [Mental health impact on healthcare workers due to the COVID-19 pandemic: a U.S. cross-sectional survey study - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)
