

EDITORIAL: Considerations for nursing research after the COVID-19 pandemic

Professor Lisa McKenna^{1,2}.

¹Professor and Dean, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Australia

²Editor Indonesian Contemporary Nursing Journal

Email corresponding author: l.mckenna@latrobe.edu.au

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted nursing in a variety of ways. Many parts of the world experienced long-term lockdowns and what work could be done remotely was undertaken that way. For those nurses engaged in research activities, particularly clinical nursing research, it presented immense challenges. Questionnaire-based research had to be moved exclusively online, while interview-based research was managed using video conference facilities and making some qualitative research approaches requiring participant observation more difficult. Being able to recruit participants for research was further challenged as researchers were unable to recruit in person and needed to resort to a multitude of online approaches such as using social media platforms. As a result of impacted recruitment, many researchers needed to report their research as being unable to meet quality measures such as sample size calculations or data saturation. This particularly impacted research students with time pressures to complete, and report on, their studies. Similarly, they needed to acknowledge in their study limitations how the pandemic had impacted on their research.

However, the impact of COVID-19 on nursing research also presented new opportunities. For what is probably the first time in the era of nursing research, a new global topic of interest provided a sense of something new. It has also provided unprecedented new content for a multitude of other disciplines, both health and non-health related. The sheer impact of COVID-19 can be seen by a continued growth in related publications, even more than two years on and even relating to just COVID-19 publishing. Ioannidis et al. (2021) reported that by 1st August 2021, there were 210,183 COVID-related publications in Scopus. At the time of writing, 25th March 2023, this figure reached 452,277. While the research focus for some time was on the pandemic itself, future research is likely to explore the long-term impacts, such as through long COVID or mental health impacts particularly on health professionals (Alanazi et al., 2022).

The pandemic also provided impetus for growth of the virtual conference, which while conveniently could be attended from one's own home, meant that the valuable networking function of conference participation could not occur. Conferences provide invaluable opportunities to hear about the research work of others in one's field and then opportunities to connect and collaborate on future work. While face-to-face conferences have now recommenced, many conferences are being conducted in hybrid modes, both face-to-face and virtual, enabling people to attend who might not otherwise be able to attend. Associated costs saved from reduced travel, accommodation and meals mean that researchers may actually be able to attend more conferences than they would have pre-COVID, and potentially in new and different topic areas. A study conducted by Hameed et al. (2021) sought to explore preferences for 'hybrid' meetings over face-to-face or virtual in urology. Their nursing and medical

participants identified networking opportunities as high in face-to-face offerings, online to be more cost effective, while learning opportunities and potential audience reach higher overall for hybrid conferences. Furthermore, reducing travel can have positive environmental benefits but reducing carbon footprint (Tao et al., 2021). Hence, it is likely that hybrid conferences will remain.

While COVID-19 has not gone away and will continue to present challenges as new strains emerge, life has started to begin to move towards what it was pre-pandemic. However, the degree to which things will return remains unclear. So far, much work is still occurring in a virtual way and many new practices have been retained. This includes changes to the ways in which research is done. For qualitative researchers, online interviews became the only way to have face-to-face contact with participants. However, they also provided convenience, as participants and researchers were not required to travel to meet in person. It also meant that it was possible to interview participants living long distances away, even in countries other than researchers. Given these benefits, it is possible this approach may have actually increased participation in that type of research. It is noted however, that this type of research does require careful attention to methodology and ethics (Roberts et al., 2021). Similarly, the growth in social media recruitment enabled much wider recruitment opportunities that are likely to remain. This also presents challenges for researchers with risk of bias relating to access to online platforms, issues surrounding generalizability of results and individuals experiencing difficulty in differentiating between credible research and a growing amount of junk emails (Hlatshwako et al., 2021).

Overall, COVID provided new challenges and opportunities for nurse researchers. However, there will also be a time for moving on to other non-COVID-19 related research, refocusing on issues of importance. While COVID-19 has been at the forefront for the past three years, other pressing health issues will have arisen that require attention by nursing researchers, including those confronting the nursing workforce itself (Efendi et al., 2022). Fatigue is widespread and many researchers will need new strategies, and potentially even new topics of interest, to reinvigorate their work. It is timely to consider building new, or rebuilding former, research partnerships to enable this. Furthermore, conferences are beginning to resume in face-to-face mode, with many taking hybrid approaches with both virtual and face-to-face options available. This offers some, but still limited, opportunities to connect with peers and generate new research ideas.

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