

The Resiliency of Ambulatory Care Nurses



Kathleen Martinez

We have seen pain and we have endured loss. We have been tested in ways never anticipated and have responded with courage and ingenuity never imagined. During the pandemic, ambulatory care nurses were always present, available, providing information, education, recommendations, and direction in a time of misinformation, anxiety, and fear.

As ambulatory care nurses, you are experts at care coordination and transition management[®] and telephone triage. These skills were paramount during the pandemic. While other specialties scrambled to redefine their profession within the limitations imposed by the quarantine and government regulations, ambulatory care nurses seamlessly navigated the chaos to ensure the health and safety of patients. The final numbers are not yet in, but the CDC estimates that the total number of COVID-19 cases may be close to 100 million. Using predictive models, they estimate approximately 5% of COVID-19 cases required hospitalization. Although all health care settings have been impacted during this pandemic, the number of infected compared to those hospitalized is dramatic. A significant burden of this disease has fallen on ambulatory care, including caring for those persons hospitalized with severe disease who are now facing the challenges of rehabilitation.

In the early days of the pandemic, many nurse-based telephone triage call centers saw their call volumes increase by thousands of calls per day. Nurses put in long hours and worked extra shifts while trying to sort out information and guidelines that were changing daily. Telephone triage is a complex skill where the nurse is required to assess a patient using only the phone. Strong nursing assessment skills are paramount. Determining when care can be safely delayed is challenging. In some patients, the line between urgent and non-urgent is very slim, and the impact from delay of care is a constant concern. High volume, high acuity, and long hours – combined with limited referral resources – increased the strain on nurses during this time. Ambulatory care professionals in schools, prisons, day cares, primary and specialty care clinics, federally qualified healthcare centers, and rural health care centers continually assessed risk versus benefit while navigating shortages of testing supplies and PPE.

Many ambulatory care nurse leaders were tapped to take on unprecedented projects. Nurses opened, staffed, and ran SARS-COV-2 testing centers in empty storefronts and community centers. They were asked to find a way to keep

homeless individuals safe under social distancing restrictions. When the vaccine became available at last, nurses were asked to organize mass vaccination campaigns in ball parks, stadiums, and parking lots. These are things you do not learn in nursing school! You are amazing!

Together, we are better. The American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN) is a professional organization committed to supporting all nurses practicing in ambulatory care through advocacy, education, networking, and leadership growth opportunities. *ViewPoint* is a CINAHL-indexed professional publication that is committed to publishing research, QI, and EBP manuscripts from nurses working in ambulatory care. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are available to promote networking and collaboration. Numerous awards and scholarships exist to honor and recognize excellence. I could not be prouder to serve as AAACN President for 2021-2022.

As we take a breath and prepare for our next adventures, know that you are part of a caring community who is here to encourage, support, and cheer on the outstanding work that occurs every day. What you do matters! ●

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