

Supporting early career nurses



■ APRN resources ■ Preventing misinformation

How to transcend stress and soar as an early career nurse

By Katherine O'Brien

Nursing can be a stressful profession, especially for early career nurses, but the pandemic has magnified the challenges. The good news is that nurses are finding ways to minimize stress and gain confidence through peer and mentor support and by accessing mental health and well-being resources.

Faith Ahuvia, BSN, RN, who works as an acute care nurse in a teaching hospital in Omaha, Nebraska, described the pandemic as the most stressful period in her life. Sarena Love, BSN, RN, CDS, shared that sentiment while she worked as an oncology nurse and later as a hospice case manager in Little Rock, Arkansas.



Faith Ahuvia

Challenges for both included working increased overtime, concerns about exposure to COVID-19 without adequate protection, and worrying about spreading the disease to patients or family members.

New evidence gathered by the International Council of Nurses suggests that COVID-19 is causing mass trauma among the world's nurses. In the United States, findings from the American Nurses Foundation Pulse on the Nation's Nurses Survey showed that the strain has hit early career nurses harder than others—more than 80% report feeling exhausted, 71% report feeling overwhelmed, and 65% report being anxious or unable to relax (nursingworld.org/covid-19-survey-series-results).

“During the pandemic, nurses have been in constant fight or flight mode, always waiting for the next thing that’s going to happen,” said Tari Dilks, DNP, APRN, PMHNP-BC, FAANP, director of the psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner graduate program at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Dilks, who is immediate past-president of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA), a premier organizational affiliate of the American Nurses Association (ANA), believes that the next pandemic will be one of mental health.



Tari Dilks

Finding strength

Ahuvia, an RN since 2016 and a Nebraska Nurses Association member, experienced intense isolation during the pandemic. She quarantined in a hotel whenever she thought she had COVID-19-related



symptoms. At times, her young children, who didn't understand social distancing, would cry because she couldn't hug them.

“One day when I came back from work, I sat in a corner in the garage and asked myself, ‘Why am I doing this? It is so painful.’” Soon after, this pain was interrupted by a thought about what initially motivated her to become a nurse. “At that point, I knew, instinctively, that there was nothing more I would rather do than continue taking care of patients,” said Ahuvia, who sees nursing as her calling. “I knew that health-care was where I needed to be, and I found strength from within to just keep going.” To nurture her faith, she attends church, reads the Bible, and prays with her family.

Even before the pandemic, Ahuvia turned to the ANA Mentorship Program for support, finding a mentor who has inspired her to excel in nursing. “My mentor believes in me and that has helped me to believe more in myself,” she said, adding that, “being a novice nurse has a way of making you doubt yourself.”

Among other things, Ahuvia's mentor, Alita-Geri Carter MSN, RN, CPNP-PC, a Maryland Nurses Association member, has supported her in creating a healthy work-life balance, a crucial resilience ingredient because she's the mother of four children between ages 2 and 10 and a part-time doctor of nursing (DNP) student. Carter also has helped her develop planning and time management skills, encouraging her to build exercise, relaxation, and family time into her schedule, even when times are tough.

Coping in a pandemic

Now, more than ever, mentors are an invaluable resource for early career nurses, according to Aaron Sebach, PhD, DNP, AGACNP-BC, FNP-BC, CNE, CNEcl,

SFHM, a mentor in the virtual ANA Mentorship Program. “Nurses at all career levels have been stretched to unimaginable amounts with the pandemic. It takes a toll on any nurse, [but] particularly early career nurses who don’t have as much experience,” said Sebach, chair of the DNP program at Wilmington University in New Castle, Delaware.



Aaron Sebach

Online forums are a wonderful way for nurses across the country to come together to discuss topics, share best practices, and develop solutions, according to Sebach, who is also the online community manager for ANA’s Up and Comers Community. “It broadens the horizons of early career nurses and allows them to have a wider support network,” he said.

ANA’s online communities have been an enormous support for Ahuvia, who contracted COVID-19 late last fall, passing it on to her husband. “The time I had COVID-19, I poured out my heart there. I found enormous encouragement from people,” she said.

Moving beyond fear

The stress and isolation of the pandemic was a catalyst for change for Love, who now works as a clinical documentation improvement specialist and will serve as the Region 5 director of the Arkansas Nurses Association beginning in November.

Love’s first job as an RN in 2017 was in a nurse residency program in the oncology division of a research hospital, an environment in which she felt comfortable asking questions. “It’s very common for young nurses to get thrown in [to nursing]. And it’s very scary because you know what you learned in the book, but this is real life, it’s real actual people, real families,” Love said.

But with the pandemic, the atmosphere at her workplace changed drastically. “Everyone was scared and tense. It was palpable,” recalled Love, who was sometimes pulled to the COVID-19 unit. In the beginning, she noted, there was a shortage of N-95 masks in the hospital, which added to her stress. For almost a year, to cut down on the risk of infection, Love and her husband mostly stayed in separate parts of their home, often communicating with each other via text. Added to this, Love could not see friends or go to the gym during lockdown—two ways she had dealt with stress before the pandemic.

Although she felt weighed down, Love was fortunate to have supportive friends. She also had the insight to realize she needed help and the grit to follow through with some new wellness strategies.



First, she connected with a counsellor from the employee assistance program. She also took up mindfulness meditation, including pausing for “sacred” moments. Learning to breathe and to be present helps to calm her mind, especially when called to multitask, Love said. In addition, she makes a point of expressing gratitude for things people might normally take for granted, such as her rescue dog Mazzy, a 10-year-old pointer mix who helps ease her mind.



Sarena Love practices mindful meditation.

Another change was joining ANA, where she found an online mentor who has helped her see her true potential. She also began sharing on the online ANA Community, which helps her feel less alone. In addition, she engages with the nursing community through the ANA Enterprise Healthy Nurse Healthy Nation™ (HNHN.org).

Love believes her new job takes advantage of her background in medical coding as well as nursing. “I feel like I’ve done a 360 with my life and tied it all together,” Love said. She advises new nurses to be open to new opportunities. “A beautiful thing about the nursing field is how many different things you can do. Just keep your eyes and ears open to different opportunities as you grow in your career.”

Expressing emotions fully

As for Ahuvia, she makes sure to keep connected to her emotions. Sometimes, when a patient is suffering and dying and she feels overwhelmed by the loss, she goes to the bathroom to cry, which then enables her to be present for her next patient. “Allow yourself to express the feelings deep inside,” she advised.

Dilks said, “When nurses don’t have an outlet and stuff emotions down, they will come out eventually. Nurses need a place where they can go and express their feelings fully.” When people get overwhelmed, they might be tempted to use drugs, alcohol, or food to cope, instead of dealing with the underlying feelings, Dilks added.

Nipping stress in the bud

Identifying the signs of burnout before it advances is crucial. According to Dilks, signs include numbness, feeling disconnected, and getting irritated easily.

For her part, Ahuvia knows her stress levels are too high when one of her children asks whether her “love tank” is empty. When “I am not hugging them as much, I’m not talking to them as much, then I know that something’s changing on the inside.” If she starts to become less interactive with patients or colleagues, she knows she needs to check in with close friends, supervisors, or her mentor.



Online mentors provide support for early career nurses.

“As a new nurse... get all the support that you can and allow [yourself] to be vulnerable, to learn, to ask questions,” Ahuvia said. “You can always soar above and beyond and come out of whatever challenging situation—be it COVID-19, be it anything—provided you have a supportive work environment, love what you do, have the right resources, and recognize when to utilize them.”

— Katherine O’Brien is a freelance writer focused on health, nursing, and aging.



Faith Ahuvia spending time with her family.

Sebach, a Maryland Nurses Association member, said, “I think nurses get into the profession and are excited about their new role, but 12-hour shifts can be very daunting over time. A mentor who can focus on identifying burnout and promoting self-care activities is critical.”

To avoid burnout, nurses need to do something every day—even if only for 10 minutes—just for themselves, Dilks said. She encourages early career nurses to build resiliency by talking to other nurses and to reach out for help if they’re feeling overwhelmed.

Resources

ANA Community (community.ana.org)

ANA’s social network allows members to connect with nurse colleagues across the country.

ANA Mentorship Program (mentorship.nursingworld.org)

One-to-one mentoring relationships connect mentees with nurses who have more professional experience. This unique online networking and career development opportunity is free and open only to ANA members. Enrollment for the class of 2021-2022 will open in September.

Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation™ (HNNH.org)

This free nurse health, safety, and wellness initiative, is open to all to engage and inspire individual nurses and partner organizations to take action within five domains: activity, sleep, nutrition, quality of life, and safety.

Well-Being Initiative (nursingworld.org/thewellbeinginitiative)

These well-being tools and resources, developed by nurses to support nurses, were launched by the American Nurses Foundation in partnership with ANA, American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, American Psychiatric Nurses Association, Emergency Nurses Association, and Association of peri-Operative Registered Nurses.

ANA Enterprise brings APRN resources to the fore

The ANA Enterprise offers a rich menu of content for the nation's 460,000 advanced practice RNs (APRNs). Visitors to nursingworld.org will find coverage of finance and reimbursement issues for practicing APRNs, APRN standards of practice, an online community for APRNs to confer with each other on practice and/or issues in the profession, information for nurses who might be interested in becoming an APRN, and much more. Now this abundance of resources is conveniently available under one web address, nursingworld.org/advanced-practice.

"The ANA Enterprise works strenuously on behalf of APRNs across all roles and specialties, with ongoing insights and input from APRNs nationwide," said Sean DeGarmo, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, FNP-BC, ENP-BC, director of APRN Initiatives at the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). "With the new Advanced Practice Initiatives page, we aim to highlight these efforts and better enable APRNs and RNs considering this career path to find the practice and



professional resources they need."

The Advanced Practice Initiatives page features content for current and prospective APRN students, faculty, practicing APRNs, and information on APRN policy and regulation. This includes descriptions of APRN roles, resources for pursuing education, and details about obtaining ANCC

certification. The section on policy and regulation links to extensive descriptions of APRN scope of practice, advocacy initiatives on issues such as full practice authority, and research and data involving APRNs.

An FAQs section covers certification inquiries, practice and advocacy, news and updates, and education, among other topics.

The site also links to the latest studies and news articles concerning advanced practice published in *American Nurse* and *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* and will be updated routinely to keep visitors informed on the full range of issues of importance to APRNs.

Nursing reports look to the future

The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) released *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity* report (nam.edu/publications/the-future-of-nursing-2020-2030/) on May 11. The report's vision and recommendations, offered by an expert committee, strive for health equity in the United States by strengthening the capacity and expertise of nursing. The recommendations focus on current and future challenges impacting the nursing workforce, its leadership, and education to reduce health disparities and address social determinants of health to advance health equity.

"Optimizing the vast contributions and integral role of contemporary nursing practice and leadership is essential to providing equitable, accessible, quality, and culturally appropriate care and services to all patients and populations," said ANA Enterprise CEO Loressa Cole, DNP, MBA, RN, FACHE, NEA-BC, FAAN. "The ANA Enterprise is committed to and highly engaged in work that will help propel the thoughtful and bold recommendations offered in this report."

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the ANA Enterprise continues to support and advocate for nurses working across all care settings, roles, and special-

ties. The American Nurses Association, as a member of the Tri-Council for Nursing and with support from the American Nurses Foundation, convened a summit of nursing leaders to identify critical lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and to brainstorm opportunities for transforming nursing and healthcare, now and in the decades ahead. The resulting report, *Transforming Together: Implications and Opportunities from the COVID-19 Pandemic for Nursing Education, Practice, and Regulation* (tinyurl.com/cks57zkh), details a blueprint for action that spans care settings, educational environments, regulatory agencies, and policy forums. It identifies themes that align with the recommendations in the *Future of Nursing 2020-2030* report, including equity and health equity, ethics, nursing workforce, innovation, interprofessional emergency planning and response, and mental health and well-being.



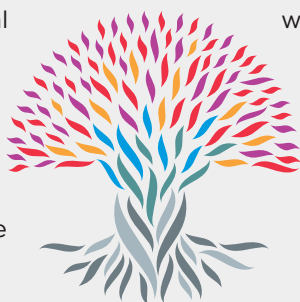
New webpage for National Commission on Racism

Since its launch in January, the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing (the Commission), a leading coalition that examines the issue of racism within nursing, has been making strides in support of its vision and mission. News and progress on the Commission's work can be found on a new webpage on nursingworld.org.

Led by the American Nurses Association, National Black Nurses Association, and National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations, the

Commission convenes monthly to explore and understand the issues of systemic and interpersonal racism within nursing. Plans are underway to host a virtual summit focused on activism and publish findings and a set of priority recommendations to address racism in nursing.

The Commission's vision is that the nursing profession exemplifies inclusivity, diversity, and equity, creating an antiracist praxis and environments. Its mission is to set as the scope and standard of practice that nurses confront and mitigate systemic racism



National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing

within the nursing profession and address the impact that racism has on nurses and nursing.

With the vision and mission as its foundation, the goals of the commission are to:

- Engage in national discussions within the nursing profession to own, amplify, understand, and change how racism negatively impacts colleagues; patients, families, and communities; and the healthcare system.
- Develop strategies to actively address

racism within nursing education, practice, policy, and research, including addressing issues of leadership and the use of power.

- Use the *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, Fourth Edition* as a framework to create a roadmap for action to address racism in nursing.

The webpage features a complete description of the Commission's work, and a list of its member organizations. It also offers a way for nurses to submit their own stories. Visit the page at nursingworld.org/commission-to-address-racism-in-nursing.

ANA NATIONAL AWARDS

Show your appreciation by honoring exceptional nursing colleagues

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses have played a critical role and continue to do so by remaining steadfast in their dedication to service and commitment to providing the highest quality care. With the one-year anniversary of the pandemic behind us and the extension of the Year of the Nurse into 2021, there has never been a more important time to honor the devotion and contributions of your nursing colleagues by nominating them for an ANA National Award. In addition to recognizing your colleagues, you'll also be educating the public about the vital role nurses play each and every day in the delivery of healthcare services.

When the Call for Award Nominations opens in August, take the time to nominate colleagues who exemplify the very best in providing direct patient care, enhancing integration and inclusion in the profession, engaging in advocacy, demonstrating the highest standards of ethical practice, improving the quality of nursing education or practice, promoting and protecting the health of people and communities, or making sustained contributions to the profession over their lifetime.



Mark your calendars! The Call for ANA Award Nominations will be open August 6, 2021, through October 1, 2021.

When a co-worker spreads misinformation

To: Ethics Advisory Board

From: Troubled RN

Subject: Misinformation about COVID-19

I'm in a work situation I find troubling. My RN co-worker is consistently and increasingly proclaiming false truths about COVID-19 that simply aren't supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other scientific agencies. Perhaps it would be easier to understand if this person had one isolated concern, such as vaccines. Instead, she seems to be fabricating more and more misinformation as the pandemic progresses and sharing it freely with patients and families. How do I handle this situation? It concerns me that she's influencing patients and fellow staff members with erroneous information. What action, if any, should I take?



From: ANA Center for Ethics and Human Rights

You're correct to raise concerns about this situation. It's troubling, both as an individual nurse in a healthcare setting and as a member of the nation's most trusted profession. You clearly recognize how valuable it is for nurses to be credible sources of scientific healthcare knowledge.

The ANA *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* (the Code) (nursingworld.org/coe-view-only) provides guidance. Because trust is the centerpiece of the nurse-patient relationship, intentional erosion of this trust negatively affects patients, families, fellow staff members, and the profession. Provision 1.3 addresses nurses' obligation in "assuring the responsible and appropriate use of interventions in order to optimize the health and well-being of those in their care," and includes "acting to minimize unwarranted or unnecessary medical treatment and pa-

tient suffering." As we know, many nursing interventions focus on communication and patient and family teaching. Sharing erroneous "facts" with others can create frustration and distress in not knowing who or what to believe.

Your situation also involves a focus beyond patients and families, in that this nurse's behavior is affecting the healthcare environment. Provision 6.3 states that "nurses are responsible for contributing to a moral environment that demands respectful interactions among colleagues," and that "unsafe or inappropriate activities or practices must not be condoned or allowed to persist." This nurse's behavior is negatively impacting the healthcare environment. The right response would be to raise this concern with your nurse manager and provide examples so that the manager can consider exploring the situation with the nurse who is sharing misinformation and counsel her about appropriate actions.

Your scientific understanding of the pressures and mental health consequences of the pandemic also might lead you to raise a different type of concern. This nurse's increasingly loud voice regarding COVID-19 "facts" could be a symptom of mental health issues related to the stress of the pandemic. The nurse manager also needs to consider this possibility and decide whether to counsel or refer this nurse for further evaluation. Additional mental health knowledge and skills might be helpful as she navigates the long, difficult journey of being on the frontline of a world-wide pandemic.

Misinformation, deliberate or otherwise, can be detrimental to patients, families, staff members, and the nursing profession. Action should be taken to address situations in which misinformation negatively affects healthcare quality.

— Response by Nelda Godfrey, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, FAAN,
a member of the ANA Center for Ethics and Human
Rights Advisory Board.

References

American Nurses Association. *COVID-19: Evidence as the Basis of Decisions*. September 2020. nursingworld.org/-4a5b08/globalassets/covid19/covid-19_evidence-as-the-basis-of-decisions-final_sm.pdf

Do you have a question for the Ethics Inbox?
Submit at ethics@ana.org.

Leadership roadmap: Allyship, flexibility, and intention

By Andrea Smith, DNP, MBA, FNP-BC, ENP-C, and Carli Zegers, PhD, APRN, FNP-BC

Our nursing careers can take many paths, but programs such as the American Nurses Foundation and United Health Foundation Jeannine Rivet Leadership Award create a clear roadmap for nursing leadership. As the first two recipients of this annual \$10,000 fellowship in 2019 and 2020, we were able to integrate our health expertise into civic and professional opportunities, while advancing our leadership potential. We both benefited from the year-long experiences provided by the Rivet Leadership Award and are eager to share highlights of those experiences. Three major themes emerged that will help advance our careers in industry and academia: community over competition, career path flexibility, and formal training and mentorship.



Rivet Leadership fellows Carli Zegers (top right) and Andrea Smith (formerly Brooks, bottom) connect with mentor Mary Jo Jerde (top left) for a video chat to share their program experiences.

Community over competition

First, and most impactful, the Rivet Leadership Award offered us more diverse educational and collaborative opportunities than we might otherwise have had. This made us appreciate how breaking barriers through intentional and purposeful collaboration will create more dynamic and creative solutions. The diversity of transformational nurse leadership perspectives we experienced across practice, business, service, academia, and policy domains expanded our networks and inspired us. Nursing's current system of intra-professional silos is a serious limitation. Choosing community over competition creates synergistic opportunities through allyship. Our fellowship experiences reinforced what we can gain by appreciating the strengths of each professional subset of nursing and raising each other up. Integrating our diverse perspectives and acting as allies are the best avenues to a better future.

Career path flexibility

Next, we discovered that nursing leadership includes both strategic and flexible career paths. Choosing a specific path, such as corporate leadership or academia, is not and should not be limiting. Through various fellowship trainings and mentorships, we learned that incorporating a variety of experiences, whether from external industry collaborations or service work on boards, adds to our dynamic careers and helps us grow strong and supportive networks. The Rivet Leadership Award program allowed for various cross-disciplinary training opportunities, including business school certifications in leadership and management, board development programming, and personality testing with a 360-degree review. We also participated in leadership presentations and workshops through programs such as Linkage Women's Institute and the Center for Creative Learning.

Formal training and mentorship

Finally, we found that formal programming and mentoring are essential to developing and advancing nursing leadership. We were fortunate to work with an exceptional mentor. Mary Jo Jerde, MBA, BSN, RN, FAAN, senior vice president of UnitedHealth Group and an Arizona Nurses Association member, skillfully and purposefully guided us in how to integrate key learnings and opportunities into our daily work.

Virtual training over the last year provided us with greater access to certification programs and workshops. For example,

the Leadership and Management Certificate Program of The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania helped us advance our knowledge of leadership in the 21st century, talent management and motivation, strategic management, and leadership in a global context.

Although we're still realizing the benefits of this fellowship, it already has had an incredible influence on our career advancement and potential. We've experienced tremendous professional and personal growth. As nurse leaders in a healthcare system and in academia, we fully endorse leadership development programs such as the Rivet Leadership Award. They will profoundly affect nurses and the profession.

— Andrea Smith is the director of clinical performance improvement for MedStar Health System. Carli Zegers is an assistant professor at the University of Kansas School of Nursing and a Missouri Nurses Association member.