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Psychological Impact of COVID-19 Can Last for Years, Nurses Ask U.S. Administration for Help

PARK RIDGE, Ill. (AANA)—Gravely concerned about the psychological health and well-being of nurses and other healthcare professionals serving on the pandemic's frontline of care, leaders of the nation's nursing organizations have urgently asked the U.S. Administration for help.

In a May 19 letter, leaders representing the voice of 5 million nurses, including advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), requested that behavioral health agencies and staff develop resources, activate U.S. mental health and service access teams to address the psychological impacts of COVID-19, and deploy military disaster mental health teams and behavioral health servicemembers to heavily impacted areas to provide psychological assistance and care for civilian nurses and other healthcare professionals.

"Urgent action is needed now to address the emotional toll among nurses and others who are experiencing trauma during this pandemic. Acting now can help prevent threats to the psychological well-being among nurses and help save the lives of patients suffering from the virus. Proactive support may help avoid the impending mental health crisis expected, once the national public health emergency is over," said Kate Jansky, MHS, CRNA, APRN, USA LTC (ret), president of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA). The AANA collaborated with nursing organizations and the American Psychological Association (APA) to address with the U.S. Administration the mental health and well-being of nurses and APRNs, who are not only first responders, but also sustained responders for patients and their families.

"America's front-line nurses risk their lives and the lives of their families each day that they tend to people with COVID-19, under some of the most stressful working conditions imaginable," said APA CEO Arthur C. Evans Jr. "Our government must provide them the help they need now in order to mitigate the threats to their psychological health and well-being."

Nurses who tend to patients with the coronavirus, and previously with severe acute respiratory syndrome (or SARS), report more severe degrees of psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, and insomnia than other healthcare workers. Nurses are facing extraordinary workloads, often without adequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE). And, in recent surveys, nurses reported extreme to moderate concern about the safety of their family and friends (87 percent), about adequate testing (84 percent), and about access to PPE (75 percent).

"We urgently ask for your help to preserve and protect the profession for the sake of our nation's future," the nursing leaders wrote, adding evidence-based interventions, such as psychological first aid and skills for psychological recovery, which can increase resiliency and reduce anxiety among those going through a crisis.

In their letter, the leaders also expressed gratitude for the presidential proclamations on designating May 6 as National Nurses Day and May as National Mental Health Awareness Month. "These proclamations recognize the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the mental and psychological health of nurses and their communities," they wrote. "Nurses in many specialties are the primary providers of patient care, and their psychological health and well-being are essential to addressing the COVID-19 public health crisis."

The full text of the letter is available [here](#).