**AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF THE SRI LANKAN INTENSIVE CARE NURSES’ PERCEPTIONS OF ORAL CARE PRACTICE OF INTUBATED COVID-19 PATIENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background**: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected countries all over the world, wreaking havoc on the global health-care system. Nurses played a unique role and were directly exposed to COVID-infected patients during patient care. As front-line fighters in both developed and developing countries, intensive care nurses gained both positive and negative experiences while providing oral care to COVID-19 intubated patients

**Objective:** The aim of this study is to explore the Sri Lankan intensive care nurses' perceptions of the practice of oral care for intubated COVID-19 patients.

**Methods:** The qualitative research approach was used. A phenomenological design was conducted because nurses’ perceptions were studied, and purposive sampling was conducted, including on 20 nursing officers who worked more than six months in the intensive care unit at the Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH), Base Hospital Homagama, and Base Hospital Theldeniya. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide as the data collection tool. Interviews were conducted in the Sinhala language within 30 to 40 minutes. During the interview, an audio recorder was used

**Results:** When exploring nurses’ perceptions of oral care practice in COVID-19 intubated patients in ICUs, three major themes and nine subthemes were identified: Oral health care in intensive care practice, barriers and enablers to oral health care, and emotional and psychological perceptions about oral care practice were related to nurses' perceptions as major themes. Positive and negative attitudes toward oral care, oral care methods used for intubated COVID-19 patients, limited information about oral care practice for COVID-19 patients, insufficient support for oral care practice, technical barriers, emotional and psychological attitudes toward oral care practice, fear of the disease process, fear of the oral care procedure, and concern about family were identified as sub themes

**Conclusion:** Intubated COVID-19 patients have a greater impact on the care delivered by the nurses, improving the quality of nursing care practice and minimizing ventilator associated pneumonia in Sri Lanka. These findings suggest that focusing on novel knowledge and skills, new techniques, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects correspond to the holistic care of intensive care patients.

**BIOGRAPHY** (100-150 words)

Miss D.G.A.I. Jayarathna has her expertise in evaluation and passion in improving the health and wellbeing. Her research experiences based on responsive constructivists creates new pathways for improving healthcare. She has invented new device for long term catheter users to improve their quality of life after years of experience in research, evaluation, teaching and administration both in hospital and education institutions. Further she worked as critical care nurse for 13 years attached to the Ministry of Health Sri Lanka, this foundation Knowledge and experiences is based on her to think out of box. This approach is responsive to all stakeholders and has a different way of focusing.

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