WOC RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

WOCN Society President's Message: Supporting Our Members Through a Pandemic

The WOCN Society mission states that we are a professional community dedicated to advancing the practice and delivery of expert healthcare to individuals with wound, ostomy, and continence (WOC) care needs. The Society supports our members' practice through advocacy, education, and research. We have been fulfilling this mission for over 50 years. During this, we have experienced local natural disasters, shortages of nursing staff, and spotty outbreaks of communicable disease that have wreaked havoc on personal and professional life. But now, we face a truly global pandemic, COVID-19, which poses a worldwide challenge like no other.

The Society stood ready to respond once we began hearing from members caring for early victims of SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2), alerting us to the critical needs of affected patients. We soon identified trends within our practice arena such as a dramatic increase in critically ill patients requiring prolonged periods spent in a prone position. As critical care colleagues scrambled to meet the logistic and mechanical challenges of maintaining a large number of patients in a prone position for a period of up to 12 hours, WOC nurses recognized and responded to the increased risk for pressure injuries created by this practice. We also saw staff in full respiratory infection control garb for 12-hour shifts suffering skin irritation and pressure injury to their faces and responded with interventions to prevent skin damage under personal protective equipment (PPE), treat existing dermatitis or wounds, while ensuring our recommendations maintained the essential protective functions these devices were designed to provide. Hospital preparedness led to dramatic changes in the population inside the building. For example, critical care beds were increased, hospital visitors were limited or eliminated, and hospital staff were forced to find innovative ways to meet staffing needs, sometimes without the ability to supplement local staff with travelers.

While the immediate impact of COVID-19 is most apparent in the acute care setting, ambulatory care and long-term care were profoundly impacted as well. In the ambulatory care setting, elective surgeries were cancelled, outpatient clinic appointments were significantly slashed, and the demand for home care surged. Once again, WOC nurses recognized that WOC care must be delivered in a safe and effective manner, creating a sudden demand for effective delivery of care via telehealth. Similarly, skilled nursing facilities were especially hit hard with transmission occurring easily based on their routines of care. Challenges to our populations are evident at every turn.

At every point in this evolving pandemic, your WOCN Society has responded. The challenge has been to keep up with the moving target of the immediate need and how the Society could assist and support its members. We realized that rapid communication and responses were essential; as a result, the Society's leadership began weekly conference calls rather than our usual monthly ones. We recognized the need for our members to seek assistance and ask questions of their peers about these specific patients. We launched a special "COVID-19" Forum where the WOC community could share as they do on the other forums. This forum serves multiple functions; it provides a safe and secure space for members to share challenges to care delivery, concerns about patient and care provider safety (as well as safety of family members as we deliver care to desperately ill patients). It also serves to provide the Board with invaluable information as it arises.

One of the frequent topics on the COVID-19 forum is skin protection under N-95 masks and other PPE worn on the face. Our members were being asked to advise their colleagues on skin care and prevention strategies. A small work group of the Board put together safe and effective measures to use for skin protection while maintaining the fit and seal of the N-95 masks. This was quickly distributed by e-mail and social media to get information into the hands of our members as quickly as possible. It is published in this issue of *JWOCN* and will be published ahead of print, acting as a resource for our members and other WOC nurses on a global basis.

Live visits to patients infected with SARS-CoV-2, along with virtual (telehealth) visits, were also top of mind to our members. The Board decided to address wound photography in an isolation setting in a practical document that could be published in a short amount of time. Another work group from the Board put the document together quickly, and our Marketing department helped with an infographic to accompany it. It was in the hands of our members right away.

In parallel, your National Conference Planning Committee collaborated with the Board of Directors to preserve the safety of Society members. As a result, WOCNext, scheduled to be held in Cleveland, Ohio, has been reimaged as a virtual event. We realized that providing current continuing education to our members could not be omitted; it is essential to our mission. I am also pleased to report that the Board also voted to offer the conference free of charge to our members! The days were shifted slightly so that most of the content occurred over the weekend, and we hope that even more of our members will be able to participate. How very appropriate that our Keynote Speaker will help us all to de-stress, refresh, and take care of ourselves for a change. We all deserve an opportunity to renew ourselves and our professional relationships.

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This pandemic has been an experience that will change us forever. We have learned lessons and techniques that will serve us well into the future. We will eagerly embrace technology in all the ways it can help us. We will communicate with each other and connect regardless of our physical location. Our WOC community is huge and growing all the time. Each of us has something to offer and something to learn. It has been my privilege to lead this great organization through this trying time. Just as we help our patients find their new normal, we now have

to help each other find ours. What better place to look than to the WOCN Society!

Respectfully submitted,

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*President
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Society*