



## From the Editor

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# Where Has the Love Gone?

Last week, I had a follow-up appointment with my primary care physician at a large teaching medical center. It was five months since my previous appointment. I was amazed by the number of people in the waiting area, quite an increase in numbers from my visit last fall. “Three people in administration and three in nursing called out today,” the nurse informed me as she walked me to an exam room. “It really makes it difficult for the rest of us.”

After my appointment, I went to the lab for bloodwork. Again, I was struck by the massive number of people in the waiting area, sitting side by side rather than socially distancing, so many in fact that people were waiting in the hallway outside. While my blood filled the tubes, I commented to the lab tech that the lab seemed busier than usual. “We’re short-staffed. Several people called out today,” she explained. “It happens often these days.”

We know the pandemic has taken its toll on everyone, transforming nearly every aspect of what we had previously considered ‘normal’ life. With dual impacts on home and work lives, health care workers have been particularly affected (Stephens et al., 2022). Pearman and colleagues (2020) found health care professionals were more likely to experience symptoms of depression, COVID-related stress, tiredness, and general anxiety, and were less likely to cope well, when compared to a group of age-matched controls from the general population.

In the early months of the pandemic, nurses were honored and deemed saviors and angels. Signs outside hospitals (see the Editorial in the September/October 2020 issue of *Pediatric Nursing*), pizza deliveries, and balloons and gifts in the lobby were common. Perhaps one of the most imaginative appreciative efforts was in June 2020, when Barcelona’s Gran Teatre del Liceu held a performance before a ‘live’ audience, filling its 2,292 seats with plants. The UceLi String Quartet serenaded its ‘audience’ with Giacomo Puccini’s “Crisantemi.” The performance was also available to human listeners via livestream. Local nurseries provided the plants, which after the concert were donated, along with a certificate from Artistic Director Blanca de la Torre, to 2,292 health care professionals at Barcelona hospitals (see Figure 1 and scan QR code to watch the concert and hear the beautiful music, including the gentle leafy applause).

### Lack of Love Today

Unfortunately, the pandemic’s early days of nurses being generously buoyed by a grateful public seem to

Rollins, J.A. (2022). Where has the love gone? *Pediatric Nursing*, 48(3), 109-110.

have passed (Lambert & Matthews, 2022). In fact, dwindling support in some cases transformed into outright hostility as the COVID-19 response became a politically polarizing topic:

“I’ve had nurses spit at,” said Vicki Good, the executive director of nursing at Mercy Hospital in Springfield, Missouri. “Suddenly we go from being the hero to the villain...physical and emotional violence against healthcare workers is escalating like never before. (As quoted by Good in Lambert & Matthews, 2022, para. 19)

According to findings from a study of nurses working in hospitals, in the early months of the pandemic, 44% of nurses reported experiencing physical abuse by patients (e.g., hitting, biting, choking, hair-pulling), and 67% reported verbal abuse by patients (Byon et al., 2021). Nurses caring for patients with COVID-19 experienced both more physical and verbal abuse, and one in 10 nurses felt reporting the incident was more difficult during the pandemic.

Violence and aggression against health care workers isn’t new. Prior to the pandemic, 8% to 38% of health care professionals reported experiencing physical violence at some point in their careers (Meyer, 2021). However, the rapid spread of COVID-19 has triggered a wave of violence, with health care workers reporting discrimination, ostracism, harassment, and stigmatization as carriers of infection (Bitencourt et al., 2021; Larkin, 2021).

According to Laranjeira (2021), several precipitating factors imply that frontline workers, especially nurses, are among the professionals most negatively affected by the pandemic: intensive and long work schedules, increased workload, adaptation to new working protocols, risk of infection and transmission to their relatives, disruption of family and personal life, mental stress and trauma, permanent health deterioration, and death (Özkan et al., 2021). Other inciting reasons for occupational violence that might impact nurses when interacting with the public include health care authorities’ refusal “to admit COVID-19 patients due to limited space, the death of relatives in the hospital, and refusal to hand over deceased patient bodies without the results