

Chinese medical staff request international medical assistance in fighting against COVID-19

On Jan 24, 2020, we came to Wuhan, China, to support the local nurses in their fight against the COVID-19 infection. We entered the Wuhan isolation ward as the first batch of medical aid workers from Guangdong Province, China. The daily work we are doing is mainly focused on provision of oxygen, electrocardiogram (ECG) monitoring, tube care, airway management, ventilator debugging, central venous intubation, haemodialysis care, and basic nursing care such as disposal and disinfection.

The conditions and environment here in Wuhan are more difficult and extreme than we could ever have imagined. There is a severe shortage of protective equipment, such as N95 respirators, face shields, goggles, gowns, and gloves. The goggles are made of plastic that must be repeatedly cleaned and sterilised in the ward, making them difficult to see through. Due to the need for frequent hand washing, several of our colleagues' hands are covered in painful rashes. As a result of wearing a respirator for extended periods of time and lack of protective equipment, some nurses now have sores on their ears and forehead. When wearing a mask to speak with patients, our voices are muted, so we have to speak very loudly. Wearing four layers of gloves is abnormally clumsy and does not work—we can't even open the packaging bags for medical devices, so giving patients injections is a huge challenge. In order to save energy and the time it takes to put on and take off protective clothing, we avoid eating and drinking for 2 hours before entering the isolation ward. Often, nurses' mouths are covered in blisters.

Some nurses have fainted due to hypoglycaemia and hypoxia.

In addition to the physical exhaustion, we are also suffering psychologically. While we are professional nurses, we are also human. Like everyone else, we feel helplessness, anxiety, and fear. Experienced nurses occasionally find the time to comfort colleagues and try to relieve our anxiety. But even experienced nurses may also cry, possibly because we do not know how long we need to stay here and we are the highest-risk group for COVID-19 infection. So far 1716 Chinese staff have been infected with COVID-19 and nine of them have unfortunately passed away. Due to an extreme shortage of health-care professionals in Wuhan, 14 000 nurses from across China have voluntarily come to Wuhan to support local medical health professionals. But we need much more help. We are asking nurses and medical staff from around the world to come to China now, to help us in this battle. We hope the COVID-19 epidemic will end soon, and that people worldwide remain in good health.

We declare no competing interests.

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Yingchun Zeng, Yan Zhen
596830447@qq.com

Department of Nursing, Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical Hospital, Guangzhou 510150, China (YiZ); Department of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Sun Yet-sen Memorial Hospital, Sun Yet-sen University, Guangzhou, China (YaZ).



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