

Nurses' Ethical Challenges During Caring for COVID-19 Patients: Literature Study

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Abstract: Nurses are frontliners during the COVID-19 pandemic and are vulnerable to ethical challenges when caring for patients with COVID-19. The ethical challenge of nurses is basically due to the gap between nursing practice and nursing goals. This study aims to identify empirical evidence related to the ethical challenges nurses face when caring for COVID-19 patients. This research method uses a literature study that analyzes articles from five international reputable databases such as CINAHL, Pubmed, Proquest, Science Direct, and search engines Google Scholar. The keywords used to facilitate the search for articles were 'COVID-19', 'critical care nursing', 'intensive care nursing', 'intensive care nurses', 'critical nurses', 'intensive care nurses', 'caring', 'ethical challenges', 'ethical issues', 'ethic dilemmas', 'ethical challenges', 'ethical issues', and 'ethical dilemmas'. with the help of boolean operators and then the articles are selected gradually using PRISMA. From the search results obtained 7 articles that deserve to be analyzed. There are three themes related to ethical challenges that occur, namely ethical challenges in the nursing care process, ethical challenges in nursing professionals, and ethical challenges in health interprofessional relationships. Ethical challenges cause nurse discomfort at work, and can even cause job stress. Regarding these results, nurses need to get support to overcome ethical dilemmas that occur through the provision of resources according to needs, preparation of SOPs regarding the roles and duties of nurses, as well as increasing knowledge regarding the care of COVID-19 patients.

Keywords: COVID-19, Critical Care Nursing, Dilemma Ethic, Ethical Challenges, Ethical Issue

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has infected and caused the death of many people in all parts of the world, officially on March 11, 2020 WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic (WHO, 2020). Since it first appeared, COVID-19 has infected nearly 100 million people worldwide and caused 2 million deaths (Firouzkouhi et al., 2021). During the pandemic, health workers proved to be unprepared because of the unfamiliar work environment, conflicts between health workers, lack of clinical resources, and social distancing restrictions. The rapidly increasing number of cases of COVID-19 infection has made health services face multidimensional challenges in carrying out their professional duties and responsibilities (Dudzinski et al., 2020; Nyashanu et al., 2020).

Nurses are one of the health workers who struggle at the forefront during a pandemic who provides health services on an ongoing basis from the time the patient enters until the patient leaves the hospital (Zhang et al., 2020). During the pandemic nurses play an important role in the prevention of the pandemic and the care of COVID-19 patients (WHO, 2020). In China, nurses are the health workers who are most involved in treating COVID-19 patients, around 68% compared to medical or other health workers (Chang et al., 2020). Caring for COVID-19 patients is fraught with ethical challenges for nurses (Firouzkouhi et al., 2021). Because apart from being tasked with providing nursing care to COVID-19 patients, nurses are also actively involved in hospital leadership and manager activities during the pandemic, which may lead to ethical problems with other health workers. Therefore, it is clear that nurses face many ethical challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gebreheat & Teame, 2021).

An ethical challenge is defined as a condition resulting from moral dilemmas and conflicts,

and other scenarios under challenging situations, which the nurse or other care team may not be able to resolve. An ethical dilemma is described as an unsolvable situation, a decision between two options may make moral sense but is equally problematic due to circumstances (Ejder Apay et al., 2020). Meanwhile, ethical conflicts arise when someone realizes the need for such action, but there are several obstacles from internal or external factors (Larkin et al., 2019). In health services, all health workers are required to apply the four main principles of biomedical ethics in treating patients, namely autonomy, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence. However, in a situation where nurses lack PPE in performing services that put them at high risk for infection, not only to themselves but also to their families and other patients. Thus, this violates the ethical principle of not harming others or non-maleficence (Shah & Acharya, 2020).

The results of research conducted by Pashar., et al (2020) stated that the ethical challenges faced by nurses during treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic were patients with COVID-19 who were treated differently from other patients, the presence of inequality, high demands for professional ethics, and changing job competencies. In another study, Geberheat & Teame (2021) added that the ethical challenges felt by nurses were related to safety between nurse-patient-and family, different roles and moral pressures of health workers, and limited resource allocation. Basically, the cause of this challenge in nursing ethics is the gap between existing nursing practice and ideal nursing goals (Liu et al., 2021).

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many ethical problems that are difficult for nurses to deal with in caring for patients and families (WHO, 2020). Such challenges can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, fear, stress, insomnia, or emotional instability (Chang et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). Nurses must have good skills in dealing with ethical issues. Nurses must think rationally, not emotionally in making ethical decisions. The ability to make ethical decisions is one of the requirements for nurses to carry out professional nursing practice (Haryono, 2012).

There are still many ethical challenges faced by nurses when caring for COVID-19 patients and need to be considered, the results of research that discuss ethical challenges have been carried out but are still limited and the results are mixed. This study aims to identify empirical evidence related to the ethical challenges nurses face when caring for COVID-19 patients.

METHOD

The literature study research method was used to identify ethical challenges when caring for COVID-19 patients experienced by nurses. Literature study is a critical synthesis of articles published in reputable databases that can be used to obtain a summary of the theory and the latest empirical findings according to the topic (Cisco, 2014). The data in this study were obtained from research results published in internationally reputed databases such as CINAHL, PubMed, ProQuest, Sciencedirect search engine Google Scholar To facilitate the search for data, the researcher conducted a search based on keywords based on the PEO (Population, Exposure, and Outcome) format and boolean operators adapted to the Medical Subject Heading (MeSH Term) (Nursalam, 2020). The keywords used in this study are as follows :

Table 1. Keywords

<i>PEO Format</i>	<i>Keyword</i>	<i>Mesh Term</i>
<i>P (Population)</i>	<i>COVID-19, Critical Care Nursing, Intensive Care Nursing, Perawat Kritis, Perawat Intensive Care.</i>	<i>COVID-19, Critical Care Nursing, Intensive Care Nursing, Intensive Care Nurses.</i>
<i>E (Exposure)</i>	<i>Caring, Perawatan.</i>	-
<i>O (Outcome)</i>	<i>Ethical Challenges, Ethical Issue, Dilemma Ethic, Tantangan Etik, Isu Etik, Dilema Etik.</i>	-

Articles identified from five databases will be screened first based on predetermined criteria, as follows:

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The year of the literature source taken from January 2020 to December 2021. 2. English and Indonesian article. 3. Subjects or research samples are intensive care nurses. 4. Articles <i>full text</i>. 5. The research theme is the ethical challenge of nurses while caring for COVID-19 patients. 6. Research study designs are original articles such as quantitative and qualitative research. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article is not complete, only in the form of an abstract. 2. <i>Full text</i> is not available.

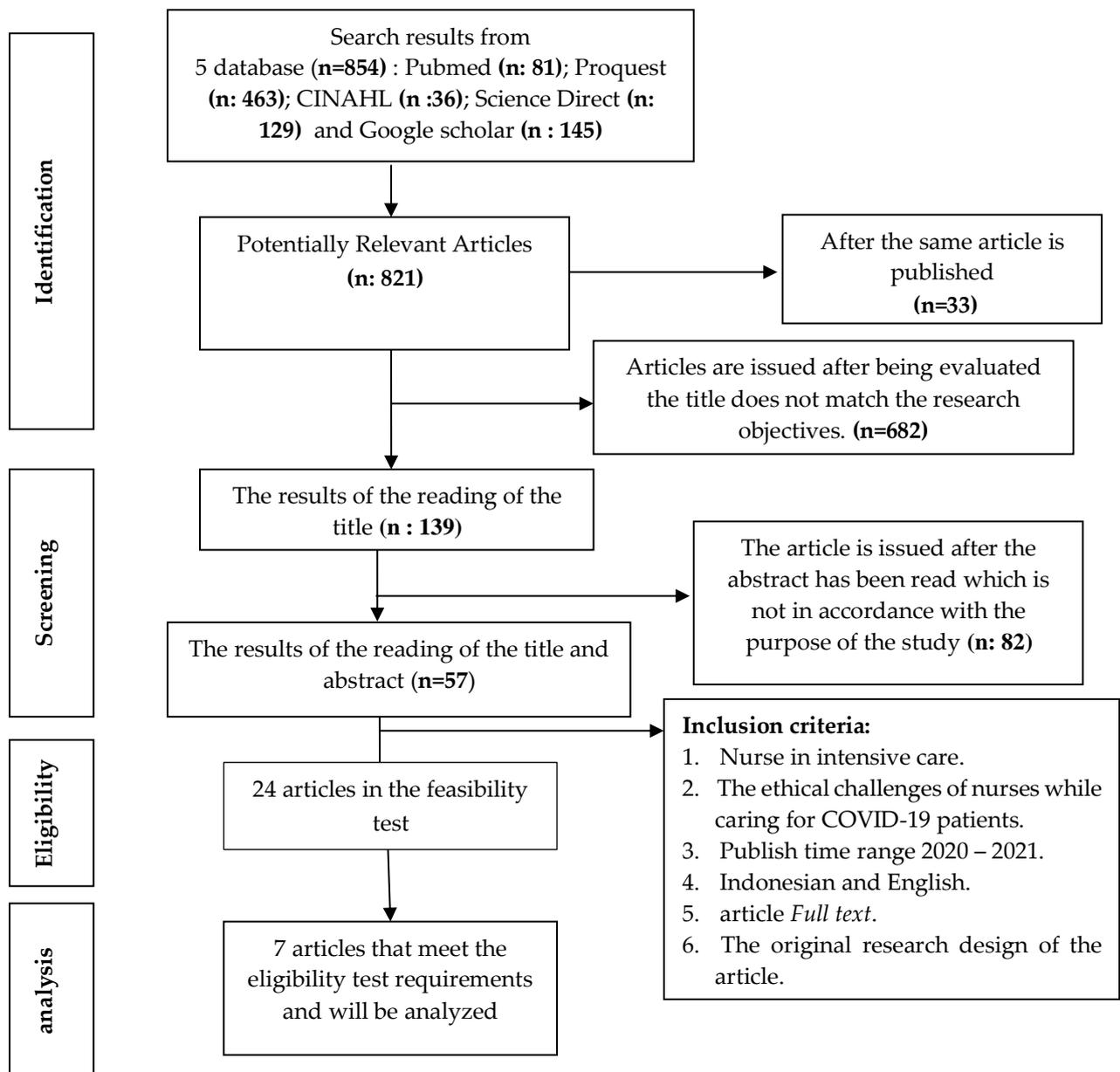


Figure 1. Article Selection Process using PRISMA

Based on article searches in 5 databases, 854 articles were identified based on keywords. Researchers tracked the same articles using Mendeley's tools, then 33 of the same articles were removed. Then the researcher continued the screening by reading the title and abstract and obtained 57 articles that matched the research objectives. Of the 57 suitable articles, screening was carried out based on predetermined criteria and 24 articles were identified. Then the researchers conducted a feasibility test on 24 articles by reading the text in its entirety and selected using the Joana Bright Institute Critical Appraisal Tools, so that 7 articles that are relevant to the research topic will be obtained and finally data analysis will be carried out.

RESULT

Based on the results of the data search that has been carried out, there are seven articles that are in accordance with the research objectives and discuss the ethical challenges of nurses while caring for COVID-19 patients. Of the seven articles specified, all articles used a qualitative research design. Then the researcher extracted the data by analyzing the data based on the author's name, year of publication and country, research design, population, exposure and outcome in the article. The results of data extraction identified the findings of previous studies which were used to analyze the theme of the ethical challenges of nurses while caring for COVID-19 patients. The determination of the theme is based on issues related to the four basic ethical principles such as autonomy, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence in the care of COVID-19 patients and under what conditions the ethical problem occurs. So that there are three main themes about ethical challenges that occur, namely ethical challenges in the nursing care process, ethical challenges in nursing professionals, and ethical challenges in health interprofessional relationships. The results of data extraction will be presented in table 3 below:

Table 3. Data Extraction

No	Author, Year of Publication, and Country	Design	Sample (Population)	Objective (Exposure)	Findings (Outcome)
1	(Alloubani et al., 2021) Jordania	This study used a qualitative design with a descriptive approach.	The sample in this study consisted of 10 COVID-19 nurses who were selected using a purposive sampling technique.	This study aims to explore nursing ethics in patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Nurses must provide care to patients fairly without comparing the patient's medical diagnoses. The ethical dilemma felt by nurses is related to the ambiguous feeling between having to care for patients and protecting themselves from COVID-19.
2	(Rezaee et al., 2020) Iran	This research design uses a qualitative study.	The sample of this study were 24 nurses who treated COVID-19 patients in the ICU.	This study aims to explain nurses' perceptions of ethical challenges in caring for COVID-19 patients.	The ethical challenges experienced by nurses when caring for COVID-19 patients are nurses feel a threat to the professional value of nursing and a reduced holistic nursing approach. Threats to the value of nursing professionalism are felt due to the risk of decreasing the quality of patient care and the public stigma against COVID-19 nurses. then the lack of holistic nursing is felt due to poor COVID-19 spiritual care, poor compassionate care, and the lack of involving families in the care of COVID-19 patients.
3.	(Sperling, 2021) Israel	This study uses a qualitative design with a descriptive approach.	The sample in this study consisted of 231 nurses	This study aims to explain concerns, ethical issues, and attitudes related to care during the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel	There are 22 ethical dilemmas experienced by nurses while caring for COVID-19 patients which are grouped into six categories, namely: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide care even though there is a high risk of infection for yourself and close family. 2. Provide care without sufficient material/monetary support. 3. Provide optimal care in cases that are not known with certainty, lack of knowledge of the disease. 4. Providing care in uncomfortable conditions related to the use of full PPE over a long period of time. 5. Provide care despite objections to controversial decisions such as separating newborns from mothers with confirmed COVID-19. 6. Focusing on treatment for COVID-19 patients, people are afraid to go to health care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4.	(Karaca & Özkan, 2021) Turkey	This study uses a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach.	The research sample was 15 COVID-19 ICU nurses.	This study aims to analyze the ethical challenges experienced by COVID-19 nurses when providing services.	COVID-19 ICU nurses experience ethical dilemmas when caring for patients, according to nurses it is very important to apply patient prioritization standards and quality of care based on international referrals. to avoid ethical dilemmas while treating COVID-19 patients. The concept of an ethical dilemma is that there is a conflict of interest in

5.	(Liu et al., 2021) China	This study used a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach.	The sample in this study consisted of 10 nurses who treated COVID-19 patients in the ICU.	The purpose of this study was to explore the ethical dilemmas faced by nurses in Jiangsu Province of China during the COVID-19 pandemic.	choosing the best course of action. There are several conditions that cause ethical problems, including because of the neglected patient's right to obtain information about the treatment plan, and the right to choose treatment. The condition of the rapid spike in cases also causes nurses to ignore patient privacy when providing treatment. all nurses are also confused about their role in the COVID-19 ICU which is the most common and common ethical dilemma.
6.	(Jia et al., 2021) China	This research design uses a qualitative study.	The sample in this study consisted of 18 nurses who treated COVID-19 patients in the ICU.	The aim of this study is to elucidate the ethical challenges faced by nurses caring for patients with novel pneumonia coronavirus (COVID-19).	The results of in-depth interviews with nurses in charge of caring for patients with COVID-19 found 3 themes related to ethical challenges faced by nurses including ethical dilemmas in clinical nursing related to self-protection and patient care, ethical dilemmas in interpersonal relationships with other health workers, and ethical dilemmas in nursing management that arise from a lack of personal protective equipment and resources. One of the ethical problems faced by nurses is related to the principle of patient autonomy which is often neglected to know treatment planning, make decisions regarding care, and neglected patient privacy. nurses also feel that they experience injustice regarding their exposure to the care environment because of the ambiguity of the roles of doctors and nurses themselves. This ethical problem arises because of an unprepared response to a pandemic situation, a low sense of responsibility, lack of knowledge and skills, and an inability to adapt psychologically to the stress caused by the pandemic.
7.	(Abbasinia et al., 2021) Iran	This study uses a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach	The participants in this study were 18 nurses at an Iranian hospital.	This study aims to explore experiences related to ethical issues when treating COVID-19 patients.	The results of the interview stated that there were strong ethical dilemmas. Nurses felt confused because of the limited knowledge and accurate information about COVID-19 which would cause doubts when providing services.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the article review, three themes were found related to the ethical challenges of nurses while caring for COVID-19 patients. The determination of the theme is based on problems related to basic ethical principles while providing care to COVID-19 patients and under what conditions the ethical problem occurs. Three themes related to the ethical challenges of nurses while caring for COVID-19 patients are as follows:

Ethical Challenges in the Nursing Care

Ethical challenges can occur in clinical practice of nursing care for COVID-19 patients (Jia et al., 2021). The ethical challenge of nurses refers to the existence of ethical dilemmas and conflicts as well as other scenarios due to difficult choices (Larkin et al., 2019). Ethical dilemmas are described as difficulties in making decisions made by two people, because both have benefits but also have effects. While ethical conflict is described when someone realizes the need to take certain actions but finds it difficult to do so due to internal or external factors (Kim et al., 2020; McGibbon et al., 2010).

COVID-19 is a contagious infectious disease caused by the unprecedented SARS-CoV-2 virus accompanied by a very rapid spread of the disease (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 patients in critical care tend to experience COVID-19 with severe-critical symptoms such as respiratory failure, ARDS, septic shock, and even multiple organ dysfunction system (MODS) (PPDI et al., 2020). So the need for intensive care rooms during the COVID-19 pandemic has doubled than usual (Bravata et al., 2021). Setting patient priorities and access to treatment causes ethical problems, namely the difficulties faced in every decision-making process regarding the treatment to be carried out (Jeffrey, 2020). Most nurses (68%) have experienced ethical challenges in setting priorities for COVID-19 patients as a result of an imbalance between resources and a high spike in cases (Miljeteig et al., 2021). Every nurse has an ethical commitment to provide nursing care regardless of gender, race, status in society, and also includes a diagnosis of COVID-19 disease which has a high risk of transmission (Alloubani et al., 2021).

In addition to priority issues, the ethical challenge related to the care of COVID-19 patients that nurses feel is the existence of the autonomy and privacy rights which are neglected (Karaca & Özkan, 2021). rights autonomous of COVID-19 patients to know the condition of the disease and choose treatment plans are difficult to implement due to the condition of critical patients who do not allow them to communicate and decide things rationally. Due to the rapid increase in the number of patients, nurses are required to provide care beyond the capacity of critical care. Nurses stated that they could not consider patient privacy as a priority so that they could do their work effectively and quickly for all patients (Karaca & Özkan, 2021).

Ethical Challenges in Nursing Professionals

Nurses are the health workers most involved in handling COVID-19 patients, around 68% (Pashar et al., 2020). Providing nursing care to patients with COVID-19 also raises several ethical challenges for individual nurses or among nurses. Some of the ethical challenges that arise include the obligation to care for patients or protect themselves and their families, inconvenience of working using PPE for long periods of time, lack of resources, reduced holistic nursing care, and lack of knowledge and skills.

While caring for COVID-19 patients, nurses are caught in an ethical dilemma. On the one hand, nurses feel they should not be forced to work caring for patients with COVID 19 due to personal and social reasons such as nurses who are pregnant and nurses who have families at risk (children and the elderly), but on the other hand nurses feel a professional commitment to not say no (Liu et al., 2021). However, one aspect of the nursing code of ethics is self-care. The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics also stipulates that nurses have an obligation to prioritize their own health and safety (ANA, 2016). Nurses feel a dilemma, whether to treat patients or protect themselves from the corona virus (Alloubani et al., 2021; Sperling, 2021).

Health workers who carry out examinations of COVID-19 patients are required to use complete personal protective equipment (PPE), to avoid exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Personal protective equipment includes gloves, medical mask, goggles or face shield, and protective clothing, as well as special procedures, a respirator (e.g. N95 or standard FFP2 or equivalent) and aprons (WHO, 2020). The use of complete PPE over a long period of time causes ethical challenges for nurses in the form of working in uncomfortable conditions (Sperling, 2021). This is supported by the results of Mutu et al (2020) research which states that the COVID-19 pandemic poses stress challenges including the large workload, the use of personal protective equipment that requires very strict protocols, and the shortage of nurse resources causing high moral pressure to be faced. by nurses (Miljeteig et al., 2021).

Research conducted by Rezaee., et al (2020) stated that while caring for COVID-19 patients nurses experienced ethical challenges in the form of threats to decrease professional values and decrease holistic nursing care. The threat of nursing professional values due to the shortage of nurses in critical care makes nursing managers have to recruit new members with minimal knowledge and experience. Nurses stated that they were providing care to COVID-19 patients for the first time, and they did not have sufficient experience (Jia et al., 2021; Karaca & Özkan, 2021). Nurses are confused about the unknown illness and lack of accurate information, this confusion causes a lot of indecision in work for some nurses (Abbasinia et al., 2021). They feel professionally incompetent when they see no signs of patient improvement, this ethical condition is identified as professional incompetence (Karaca & Özkan, 2021). But they still have to provide optimal care in cases that are not known with certainty and lack of knowledge of the disease (Sperling, 2021).

The diminishing holistic approach to COVID-19 care is divided into sub-categories such as poor spiritual care, poor compassionate care, and lack of family-centered care (Rezaee et al., 2020). The nurse stated that it was important to provide spiritual care for COVID-19 patients to increase patient peace, but in current conditions it has not been implemented properly (Rezae et al, 2020). Likewise with compassionate care, caregivers do not have enough time to communicate constructively with patients when providing care to COVID-19 patients (Sonis et al., 2020). While the lack of family-centered care was due to a visitation restriction policy to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, nurses stated that the lack of family-centered care for COVID-19 patients was an ethical challenge regarding morals (Naylor et al., 2020).

Ethical Challenges in Health Interprofessional Relationship

Care of patients with COVID-19 cannot be separated from the collaboration of various health professionals which can trigger ethical challenges felt by nurses if collaboration does not go well. nurses expressed role confusion as the most common ethical dilemma (Karaca & Özkan, 2021). Nurses stated that conflicts of opinion with the medical profession often occur during the treatment of COVID-19 patients related to differences in conflicts of interest in choosing the right action, the assignment of nurses to perform doctor's duties (Karaca & Özkan, 2021). Building a relationship between doctors and nurses based on collaboration and active listening can help improve teamwork and reduce the level of nursing ethical dilemmas (Liu et al., 2021).

In addition, during the nursing process for COVID-19 patients, there are inequalities in the duties felt by nurses, nurses get assignments and the time they are in an infectious environment is longer than doctors. Nurses must observe patients regularly, administer infusion therapy, change positions periodically, and meet other basic needs. In some cases doctors often shift the tasks they have to do to nurses such as performing a physical examination for infection parameters and performing blood gas analysis instead of going directly to the patient care room (Jia et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Nurses experience many ethical challenges when caring for patients with COVID-19, both ethical challenges in the nursing care process such as conflicts in setting patient priorities, providing care without discriminating against patients, and neglected patient rights. Ethical challenges in nursing

professionals such as conflicts between providing care or protecting oneself and one's family, working in discomfort, holistic care, lack of knowledge and experience caring for COVID-19 patients. As well as ethical challenges in health interprofessional relationships such as role confusion, conflicts between health workers, and inequalities of duty.

Ethical challenges will make nurses full of discomfort while working, it can even cause work stress. It is expected that nursing managers in hospitals and the government will always provide support to nurses such as providing resources as needed, making standard operating procedures (SOPs) regarding the roles and duties of nurses, and facilitating nurses to always update knowledge regarding the care of COVID-19 patients. The limitation while conducting this research was the limited results of original research articles that discussed the ethical challenges of nurses while treating COVID-19 patients.

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