The Role of Nurses in the COVID-19 Vaccination Effort

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Introduction
The purpose of this project is to research and gain an understanding of the impact and influence that nurses have on the ongoing vaccination effort against the coronavirus. In regards to the current unprecedented times, the COVID-19 pandemic has shocked the healthcare system. Nurses have always been on the frontline, playing a critical role in crisis management. In order to understand how the roles of nurses are changing, and in what ways they are affecting public health, a review of past and current nursing responsibilities is necessary. The literature review will examine the following topics: COVID-19 vaccination rates compared to vaccination rates of other infectious diseases; the public’s perception of vaccines; public’s perception of the nursing profession, nursing recruitment and involvement in the vaccination effort.

Background
COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease spread via droplets. 1/09/20 - WHO reports that the outbreak in Wuhan, China is the novel coronavirus. 1/21/20 - First reported case in the U.S. 3/11/20 - WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic. 12/11/20 - FDA issues Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Vaccines work by introducing weakened pathogens into the body, initiating the immune response and the development of antibodies. When future disease exposure occurs, the immune system developed allows the body to react immediately, preventing infection (WHO, 2021).

Public Perception
COVID-19 Vaccine:

- Prior to the pandemic, the WHO identified vaccine hesitancy as one of the top global health threats. Ex: Measles outbreaks in the U.S.
- Media coverage brought attention to “antivax groups” statements, conspiracy theories, myths and misperceptions” (Khubchandani et al., 2020).
- Some of the public’s largest concerns is the speed at which the vaccine was developed, quick clinical trials, and questions about unknown long-term effects.
- “Highest prevalence of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in African-Americans, Hispanics, those who had children at home, individuals with lower education and incomes, rural dwellers, people in the northeastern US, and those who identified as Republicans” (Khubchandani et al., 2020).
- There is a positive correlation between vaccine hesitancy and perceived risk/concern of infection with COVID-19.
- Public perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccine are also influenced by the current polarized sociopolitical climate in the U.S. Research related to the virus and vaccine became political ammunition.

Nursing Profession:

- Intense media coverage of the pandemic highlighted the contribution of nurses as the majority of the health-care workforce.
- According to the 2020 Gallup poll, nurses ranked highest in honesty and ethics by the public (Reinhart, 2020).
- Nurses are amongst the most trusted health-care professionals.
- “The current pandemic provides the profession with a stronger voice in influencing future policy and practice” (Bennet et al, 2020).
- Patients will have questions about COVID-19 and vaccination, nurses need to provide accurate and comprehensive answers.
- With the roll out of the COVID-vaccine, and various vaccination programs, nurses now have the opportunity to ensure that vulnerable populations are being protected from disparities and inequities in health-care.
- With nurses working in public health need to prioritize creating programs and opportunities for individuals that lack access to primary care, health insurance, and health education.

Significance
The significance of this research is that it offers nurses an understanding of the current factors that are influencing vaccination rates in the U.S. In recent years nursing has been shifting towards community-based public health practices. This shift has been hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The current status of health-care has created an opportunity for nurses to educate the public on health promotion and disease prevention. Understanding the relationship between the public’s perception of the nursing profession, medical community, disease processes and health practices, allows for the development of trust between patients and their caregivers.

Vaccine Statistics
- Total% U.S. Population - 39.5% (1 dose) / 25.4% (fully vaccinated)
- % of population > 65 years of age - 81% (1 dose) / 65.9% (fully vaccinated)
- U.S. is currently leading globally with most vaccines administered.

Nursing response to COVID-19
- Registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) routinely deliver vaccines.
- U.S HHS amended its rules to allow previously retired nurses to return to the workforce and aid in the vaccination effort.
- Nursing students are being recruited to volunteer and work in vaccination centers across the country.
- Patients will have questions about COVID-19 and vaccination, nurses need to provide accurate and comprehensive answers.
- A major responsibility for nurses now is dispelling fears about vaccine safety and explaining reasons for such swift vaccine development.
- Currently the risk of death/disability from COVID-19 infection outweigh the risks associated with vaccination.

References