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Nursing Graduate Students Report High Levels of Stress, Anxiety, Depression

Nearly one-quarter of survey respondents at CU College of Nursing report struggling with stress, depression and anxiety; almost one-quarter more score within area of clinical concern

AURORA, Colo. (March 30, 2021 – Researchers at the University of Colorado College of Nursing have found that nearly one-quarter of graduate nursing students have reported elevated levels of stress, anxiety and depression, compounded in the past year by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study findings, published recently in [Nurse Educator](#), also reveal that 23.8% of student respondents scored within the area of clinical concern for PTSD and immune system suppression.

“Professions in healthcare are assumed to be high-stress, but the past year brought challenges so unprecedented that it’s critical to understand how our students – who juggle clinical work and studies – are faring,” says Laura Rosenthal, DNP, associate professor at the University of Colorado College of Nursing and study author.

Graduate students (n=222) within CU’s College of Nursing participated in the study, which utilized a cross-sectional 149-item electronic survey that included two validated instruments: Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) and Impact of Events Scale – Revised (IES-R). Nearly 10% of respondents reported severe or extremely severe scores in depression and anxiety axes, while 14% responded similarly on the stress axis in the DASS-21. The IES-R results found 23.8% of respondents had clinically concerning scores, 9.5% had a possible diagnosis of PTSD and 6.2% scored high enough to possibly suppress immune system functions.

Study findings also suggest that students who experienced abrupt and mandatory changes in clinical work hours – decrease or increase – or had previously worked in a hospital pre-pandemic were at greater risk for clinically concerning scores.

“These study results are crucial in understanding how to take care of our future workforce who are already on the front lines,” says Rosenthal. “Controlled and current mental health challenges can be amplified, and students without any underlying mental health concerns can experience trauma during extreme periods of stress and uncertainty as experienced during the COVID-19

pandemic. Gauging anxiety, stress and depression can help educators and administrators provide adequate support to our student population who may be struggling.”

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