

The Importance of Volunteer Healthcare Workers in The Fight Against The COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 epidemic quickly turned into a global pandemic, which was declared the same in March 2020, and the number of infections reached tens of millions. Physical distancing, closing of schools and faculties, companies, as well as travel restrictions, have encouraged dramatic changes in everyday functioning, both worldwide and in our country, in Montenegro [1]. At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, health workers were faced with the great challenge of working in a whole new context, exhausted by heavy loads of work and protective equipment, in fear of infection, feeling powerless to cope and manage relationships in this stressful situation. Volunteer health workers can provide health services to patients with COVID infection and provide social support, using self-management strategies to cope with the situation in the fight against infection. We know that intensive work physically and emotionally exhausted the health workers of the Clinical Center of Montenegro, therefore Volunteer work in the fight against COVID infection could be taken as a good example of clinical practice regardless of the pandemic and could be useful in other areas of health care at all levels. Due to the burden on health workers and the health system, it is necessary to hire more people in order to overcome crisis situations. Significant

changes are evident in the education and employment sector with a mandatory strategy for infection control, school and university closures, which has affected the workload of health workers, especially nurses and health technicians employed at the Clinical Center of Montenegro, due to shortcomings in educated staff to be hired in terms of insufficiency in the field of clinical practice of employed nurses at the time of the pandemic [2,1]. Since March 2020, students of medical schools in Montenegro have been attending practical training in the classrooms provided for that purpose, so they are not familiar with working in hospital conditions. As for the students of the Medical College, due to epidemiological measures, they attended practical training with the help of information technology known as „Distance learning”. Based on the Law on Volunteer Work, which is defined as voluntary and free investment of time, knowledge and skills in performing services or activities for the benefit of another person or for the general benefit of society, the law is precise regarding the rights and obligations of volunteers k. [3]. It is especially important to emphasize that the volunteer needs to be familiar with the conditions of volunteering, services and activities he will perform, as well as to be aware of the dangers and shortcomings related to volunteering

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activities. Volunteer work must be performed under healthy and safe working conditions and with the possession of means and equipment for personal protection, if required by the nature of volunteer services [3]. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, a total of 285 health workers with secondary education have volunteered at the Clinical Center of Montenegro, most of whom were health technicians, followed by physiotherapists, laboratory technicians, pediatric nurses and midwives. Out of the total number of volunteers, eighteen had COVID-19 infection and all recovered. Of the total number of volunteers, eighteen had COVID-19 infection and all recovered. The response of volunteer health technicians to COVID-19 helped to quickly mobilize nurses and other health professionals and was integrated into the day-to-day work with patients and their families, where necessary. Volunteers were engaged in disinfection, as well as in educating patients about the same and their admission to hospital treatment, transport of biological material, accompanying patients to diagnostic and therapeutic procedures and more [4-6]. Volunteers for a particular patient or all patients could be family members, which would contribute to stabilizing psychological condition of the patient. However, the role of volunteers is not without challenges, both for individuals who volunteer and for organizations that must direct and provide them with support and basic guidelines for work [7]. The mortality rate from COVID-19 infection can be reduced by engaging volunteers in order to save human resources for working with serious and sedated patients with COVID-19 infection. This role is thought to be determined in part by the fact that volunteers have more time and opportunities than employed health workers, but young people who volunteer face two main obstacles: (a) emotional and practical support for them coping with the death or loss of a loved one [8]. The youth volunteer program was designed to increase the volume of services offered to palliative care patients in our community. In the volunteering program, young people should be involved in palliative care of patients, while encouraging their development - the choice of new skills and behaviors. There is no doubt that many students are ready to accept this challenge. However, for many, this is likely to be a frightening experience. [9]. The volunteering program can be useful for promoting volunteers in their career.

The volunteering program also aims at work beyond the COVID-19 epidemic, for example when there is a need for support in medical research [10]. This model can be useful for other institutions, in the sense that professors and mentors appeal to their students to get involved in the volunteering process and contribute to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide medical care and health care during the COVID-19 pandemic [11]. Motivating young people, especially health workers and students who have not yet found employment, is important for their experience in further work and useful for the healthcare system and the entire community, because they can make a great contribution to combating the COVID-19 pandemic. These young people were given the opportunity to take a state exam after completing their volunteer internship and receive the best possible recommendations that will be useful for their subsequent education, professional training and employment. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown that we are social beings and that we need other people to feel safe and accepted. Volunteers have also achieved transcendence from this unique experience. An extensive work load has physically and emotionally exhausted health workers at the Clinical Center of Montenegro. Volunteer work in the fight against COVID infection can be taken as a good example of clinical practice regardless of the pandemic and can be useful in other areas of health care. Volunteer health professionals have had important roles in promoting patients' recovery.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Značaj zdravstvenih radnika volontera u borbi protiv pandemije covid-19

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