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The Effects of Wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on Communication between Nurses, Nursing Students and Patients

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Purpose:

To investigate nursing student awareness of their communication manner while wearing PPE.

Background:

- ≈80% of communication happens non-verbally
- PPE may negatively affect communication between nurses and patients
- Challenges of effective communication while wearing PPE are incorporated or taught together in nursing courses or during their clinical rotations
- It is important to examine nurse-patient communication strategies to improve awareness of effective communication while wearing PPE to
 - mitigate communication misunderstandings,
 - promote comfort, and
 - improve health outcomes.

Setting and Methods:

- The setting was a College of Nursing at a large Southwestern University with a rural & urban care delivery area.
- An approved cover letter & online anonymous surveys were emailed via a nursing student listserv to 1,110 undergraduate and graduate students.
 - Cover letter explained the purpose of the study & requested student participation in the study.
 - Consent was implied by completed the survey.
 - One reminder was sent 4 weeks later.

Conclusions/Implications:

- Communication skills & wear of PPE are learned in nursing school
- Effective communication while wearing PPE are not addressed in nursing school.
- Wearing a face mask and PPE
 - Muffles the speaker’s voice
 - Conceals lips and intonation
 - Hides facial expressions
 - Patient may not understand the nurse’s speech
 - May lead to frustration, anxiety, and decreased quality of care
- Nurses must acknowledge communication challenges while wearing PPE
- Nurse educators should develop methods & approaches to educate student nurses in effective communication while wearing PPE.



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Results:

- Study Response Rate: 9%
- 56% of respondents were undergraduate nursing students

	Nursing School	Nursing School & Work	
Where did you learn about PPE?	32.7%	53.3%	
Where did you learn about communication skills?	23.4%	60.7%	
Where did you learn and about communication skills while wearing PPE?	24.3%	7.5%	
42.1% Did not learn about PPE and communication skills while wearing PPE			
	Always	Usually	Sometimes
Listened to patients concerns while wearing PPE	89.5%	10.5%	
Asked the patients if they could hear while wearing PPE	6.8%	67.0%	23.3%
Awareness of effective communication while wearing PPE	20.6%	62.7%	12.7%