Introduction: Needleless connectors (NCs) help to provide a safe (needle-free) link between vascular access devices, syringes, and intravenous infusion sets. Despite this, NC have been associated with catheter-related bloodstream infections, often related to poor decontamination practices. Nurses are the most frequent users of NC; this study aimed to explore their attitudes, techniques, and practices around the use and decontamination of NCs.

Methods: Using qualitative methods, we conducted seven focus groups (n=4-6, each) in cancer and surgical units of the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital (Queensland, Australia) between January and March 2019. The clinical units selected had recently taken part in a randomised controlled trial of three different methods of NC decontamination. Focus group transcriptions were analysed using content analysis.

Results: In total, n=30 participants were included in the seven focus groups (duration, 16 and 20 minutes). Six major themes were identified including: ‘safety and utility’; ‘terminology and technological understanding’; ‘clinical practice determinants’; ‘decontamination procedures and influencers’; ‘education and culture’; and ‘research and innovation’. Nurses overwhelming reported good intentions toward their decontamination and NC maintenance practices (such as NC replacement), however competing demands on their time was a barrier. Common trademarked phrases were easily articulated (e.g., ‘Scrub the Hub’), however specific local guidelines (e.g., time to clean, time to dry) were less well understood.

Conclusion: Understanding attitudes, techniques, and practices for the use and decontamination of NCs is important to enable targeted quality improvement strategies. Our study identified several important areas for improved education, and behavioural change.

37. AUSTRALIAN EMERGENCY NURSES’ EXPERIENCES OF WORK, USING PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged health care professionals and changed our approach to the delivery of patient care. Experience during the COVID-19 has highlighted the need to better understand and manage the challenges relating to the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) experienced by frontline health care workers.

Aims: To explore and describe nurses’ experience with the use of personal protective equipment in the Emergency Department (ED), during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.

Design: A qualitative explorative descriptive design was used.

Methods: Participants were 24 nurses (clinical and managerial). One focus group and 21 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted between January and April 2022. Qualitative descriptive thematic analysis was used to identify themes, elicit meaning and communicate findings using Braun and Clarke’s six steps as the guiding framework.

Results: Five main themes identified: (i) The shifting ground of the COVID pandemic experience, (ii) Disconnect between the ED team and organisational leaders (iii) Working in PPE causes exhaustion, physical discomfort and injury (iv) Challenges providing safe patient care (v) Discrete event with timeless consequences.

Conclusion: This study evidenced an array of adverse effects and staff concerns arising from use of personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic response in 2020-22. Experiences during the pandemic highlighted a long standing and urgent need to bolster the nurse workforce particularly in emergency nursing. Innovation is needed in PPE design to increase both protection from novel pathogens and user comfort.

Keywords: Registered Nurse, Emergency Department, Personal Protective Equipment, COVID-19 pandemic, Australia