



Reflections on COVID conversations

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As I write this, it is nearly Christmas at the end of another challenging year. There has been much written about the COVID impacts on global healthcare systems and economics, but I wonder that this high profile commentary and the push to move forward in a new 'COVID normal' has obscured some significant impacts on nurses everywhere.

Recent data indicates the significant depletion of the skilled nursing workforce, already under pressure, that occurred with COVID as older, experienced nurses thinking of retirement in the next few years made the decision to retire quickly rather than be redeployed. In conversations, members described not only the reality of significantly depleted rosters – requiring those who remained to 'cover the shortfall' – but also a rapid and damaging loss of expert rehabilitation nursing knowledge and experience. One member described this as "knowledge and wisdom that has been lost as they walked out the door". This, coupled with the pandemic-enforced lack of staff clinical education and training in the last few years, has resulted in what some describe as a 'perfect storm' that will realistically take years to rebuild and recover from.

And while there are some who believe we might never fully emerge from this pandemic, many rehab nurses that I have been privileged to talk to are optimistic about the future. So, in closing, I would like to share the important message members shared with me which is that, despite everything that has happened, our best way forward continues to be our willingness to help and support each other. More than anything, these last few years have provided a unique opportunity to support and learn with and from each other in ways we might not have thought possible a few years ago. So, whether the next time you are the one asking for help or the colleague being asked to help, I hope we continue to be gentle with each other (and ourselves), because no matter

what we are facing or when or how we are facing it, it continues that there is more that unites us than separates us and we will always be stronger together than apart.