

EDITORIAL

COVID-19: PRAISE IS WELCOME, BUT NURSES DESERVE A PAY RISE

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Article Info:

Received: 3 October 2020

Accepted: 13 October 2020

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.1217>

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ISSN: 2477-4073

KEYWORDS

COVID-19; pandemics; humans; Indonesia; salaries and fringe benefits; nurses; burnout

World Health Organization had designated 2020 the year of the nurse long before the COVID-19 pandemic. They were not joking; nurses are in the spotlight playing a critical role today, especially in the testing, treatment, and containment of the virus ([Kennedy, 2020](#)). What nurses perform today will influence how our health care system looks in the next ten years.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 cases in Indonesia continue to rise. As of 2 October 2020, 295,499 people confirmed positive with COVID-19, 221,340 recovered, and 10,972 died ([Ministry of Health of Indonesia, 2020](#)). It is sad news that we see every day. Conspiracy theory, economic crisis, inconsistent lockdown rules, confusing and expensive rapid and swab test, and other factors have become the hot topics in the community during the pandemic. The pros and cons related to these issues are less likely to reach the end. The majority of Indonesian people today do not care if the virus may infect them; even some people gently quoted a phrase of Charles Darwin, '*survival of the fittest*,' to describe today's condition as a natural selection ([George et al., 2019](#)). '*If you are strong and able to adapt, you survive. But, if you are weak, you will just be disappeared. There will be no more lockdown; feeding family is the only matter*' ([Hardiyanto et al., 2020](#); [Sari, 2020](#)).

Consequently, Indonesia's healthcare system's capacity, especially hospitals, has reached a limit to accommodate the patients. Although supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) may have improved, healthcare workers cannot avoid unnecessary risks. Burnout, stress, and depression lead to a low immune system that makes them more vulnerable to the virus. As of 29 September 2020, 92 nurses, 181 medical doctors, and nine dentists passed away in the battle of COVID-19 in Indonesia ([Bernie, 2020](#)). We do not know how many healthcare workers will die if this situation is not under control.

In response to the deaths of healthcare workers in Indonesia, the community recognizes and labels them as heroes. It may be well-meaning, but they do not want plaudits; clapping for them during the pandemic will not pay their bills ([Munn, 2020](#)). Nurses deserve a pay rise

considering the COVID-19 cases do not seem to end quickly. However, giving more salary is one form of appreciation of nurses' works ([Gunawan, 2019](#)). Considering the risks of losing their own life and family at home, arguments and explanations about why nurses deserve and need a pay rise are not necessary, not now ([Munn, 2020](#)). The government should pay more attention and acknowledge the nurses' value. We do not want to see more nurses and other healthcare workers in Indonesia died in the battle due to fatigue caring for patients while thinking of another side job to get more money for their family members.

'How much salary that nurses get per month in Indonesia?' That is the next question. Compared to the other healthcare workers, the nurses' salary is much lower. The salary among Indonesian nurses is classified based on employee status, namely government and non-government employees. For nurses who are government employees, their salary meets minimum wage in each region in Indonesia, around 200 USD – 400 USD per month. The salary increases based on their functional classification, from low (I/A-D) to high classification (IV/A-D) ([Gunawan, 2019](#)). While those who are not government employees, their salary is less than the standard, approximately 100 USD – 165 USD per month without any incentives ([Hardiyanto et al., 2020](#); [Sari, 2020](#)). Until 2 October 2020, there is no additional salary nor incentives given to the nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The hospitals have announced the financial bonus plan, but do not even know when the money is disbursed until today ([Hardiyanto et al., 2020](#); [Sari, 2020](#)). However, if seen from the nursing roles, there is no significant difference in nursing roles between government and non-government employees. Thus, the salary should be the same, or at least not much different.

But the next question is, '*will the salary improve nurses' works and competencies?*' Until today, there is no firm conclusion in the correlation between salary and nurses' performance and competency. However, the latest work from [Gunawan et al. \(2020\)](#) revealed that salary is the most crucial factor with the largest effect size on nurses' competence. The pay is a factor protecting against dissatisfaction. The greater the salary nurses

receive, the better their competence and performance (Gunawan et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the strong emphasis in this editorial is on the appreciation for nurses. As frontline workers, nurses are not afraid to give their lives for the sake of people's health. Florence Nightingale said that we done very little under the spirit of fear. We attribute our success to this, we never gave or took any excuse, and what nursing has to do in either case, is to put the patient in the best condition for nature to act upon him (Nightingale, 2018). So, why we need to take an excuse to appreciate nurses? A decent pay rise is one of the recognitions they deserve today.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

Funding

None.

Authorship Contribution

This article is the original work of the corresponding author.

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Cite this article as: Gunawan, J. (2020). COVID-19: Praise is welcome, but nurses deserve a pay rise. *Belitung Nursing Journal*, 6(5), 150-151. <https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.1217>