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Exploring Facebook usage pertaining to sharing information among nurses during COVID-19 outbreak in Sri Lanka

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Background: Social media is defined as internet services where the users of the service generate its online content. In healthcare, social media is used as an alternative platform to communicate health-related information among people.

Objective: To explore information sharing behaviours through Facebook among nurses during COVID-19 outbreak in Sri Lanka.

Method: The exploratory qualitative design was employed based on the framework by Andreotta et al. (Harvest social media data and compile a corpus, use data science techniques to compress the corpus along a dimension of relevance, extract a subset of data from the most relevant spaces of the corpus, and perform a qualitative analysis on this subset of data). The keywords of 'nurse' 'nursing' 'Sri Lanka' and 'Sri Lankan' were used. Data, particularly Facebook posts shared by nurses were extracted during 1st of January 2020 to 31st of March 2020. Content analysis was done and key themes were identified (Data familiarization, initial coding and identifying the themes).

Results: Four hundred (400) posts on Facebook were found in Sinhala and English languages. The Facebook post categories included self-posts (n=122), shared posts (n=193), and posts tagged by another (n=85). Various reactions of posts identified were likes (n=56060), emoji (n=6999), comments (n=4201), shared (n=28793), and texts (n=251). COVID-19 related information was disseminated through images (n=143), posters (n=131) and videos (n=57). Themes identified from posts could be categorized into the aspects of Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan by the World Health Organization: (1) Limit human-to-human transmission; (2) Identify, isolate and optimum care for patients; (3) Communicate critical risks and event information to all communities and counter misinformation; and (4) Minimize socio-economic impacts through multi-sectoral partnerships and whole-of-society approach.

Conclusion: Facebook has been used by nurses to share important information and health messages related to COVID-19, and can be identified as an important communication mode to disseminate health information during a crisis. Further studies are essential to examine the acceptability and effectiveness of Facebook as an information sharing mode.