

# 46<sup>TH</sup> GLOBAL NURSING & HEALTHCARE

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## **How nurses recognized their workplace situations when considering whether or not to be at work after the Fukushima nuclear accident: Experiences of nurses at hospitals outside the evacuation zone**

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**Statement of the Problem:** The Japan earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, triggered a nuclear accident in Fukushima. As the nuclear crisis escalated, Japanese officials expanded its evacuation zone to the 30-kilometer radius from the nuclear plant by March 15. While the increasing fear of radiation prompted people in neighboring areas just outside the evacuation zone to escape from their homes, hospitals in those areas continued their operation. It was assumed that the nurses in such hospitals wavered between working their shifts and refraining from working. The purpose of this study was to elucidate the hospital nurses' experiences at the workplace in Fukushima, wherein going to work became a matter of consideration after the accident.

**Methodology:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 non-supervisory nurses who were employed at three hospitals where the service continued in areas bordering the evacuation zone. We analyzed the transcribed interviews, focusing on how nurses perceived and interpreted their workplace situation.

**Findings:** The nurses observed various aspects of workplace situations such as how the organization responded to the crisis, how their workload had changed, and how choices were being made by colleagues. Organizational responses such as discharging patients and accepting walk-in patients were perceived as an action that both limited the organization's capacity and maintained its functioning. The nurses considered a situation with two incompatible perceptions as either a situation for not going to work or a situation which required them to go to work. Actual absence of colleagues made both choices more evident. Under such circumstances, the nurses made a decision about attendance by being aware of both choices.

**Conclusion & Significance:** The situations the nurses perceived in their workplace were multifaceted, which allowed for ambivalent interpretation. The nurses kept going to work in a situation wherein either choice seemed available.

### **Biography**

Yoshie Takahashi, RN, is a master's student of Nursing Administration at the Graduate School of Medicine, the University of Tokyo. She earned her BA in Foreign Studies from Nanzan University and BSN from Aichi Medical University. After eight years of clinical experience at an acute care hospital and its ambulatory facility in Tokyo, she is now pursuing her interest in nursing management from an academic approach. Her dissertation project addresses how nurses experienced their choice-making about their attendance following the Fukushima nuclear disaster and its consequential interaction in the workplace. Her study is part of a project which aims to describe nurses' experiences after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in an organizational context.

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