

# Correctional Nursing: Complex Care, Critical Roles, Ethical Demands

Michael J. Reyes\*

MSc Research Fellow-Correctional Nursing Pacific Regional Forensic Institute Philippines

**\*Corresponding Author:** Michael J. Reyes, MSc Research Fellow-Correctional Nursing Pacific Regional Forensic Institute Philippines, E-mail: mj.reyes@pacific-forensic.example.com

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## Abstract

Correctional nurses face multifaceted challenges from burnout and ethical dilemmas to managing chronic diseases, suicide risk, and opioid use disorder in carceral settings. They are vital for patient safety and forensic risk management, navigating resource limitations and security constraints. This includes adapting to crises like COVID-19 and leveraging innovations such as telehealth. Comprehensive support, standardized training, and ethical policies are essential to enhance nurse well-being and improve healthcare outcomes for incarcerated individuals, ensuring humane and effective care.

## Keywords

Correctional Nursing; Forensic Risk Management; Inmate Healthcare; Burnout; Suicide Prevention; Chronic Disease Management; Opioid Use Disorder; Ethical Dilemmas; Telehealth; Prison Health

## Introduction

This systematic review highlights the significant prevalence of burnout among correctional nurses, emphasizing its profound impact on their mental well-being. It underscores the critical need for targeted interventions and supportive work environments to mitigate stress, enhance resilience, and ultimately improve the quality of care provided in correctional facilities. Recognizing these stressors is a crucial step in forensic risk management, as nurse well-being directly affects patient safety and operational efficiency[1].

Understanding how correctional nurses contribute to suicide risk management in carceral settings is essential. This review maps out nurse-led interventions, revealing their pivotal role in early de-

tection, assessment, and postvention strategies. It clearly points to the need for standardized training and robust support systems for nurses, which are fundamental to reducing forensic risk and improving inmate safety within these complex environments[2].

This qualitative study offers insights into correctional nurses' experiences managing chronic diseases within prison walls. It reveals the unique challenges—like limited resources and security constraints—that impact their ability to provide consistent, high-quality care. What this really means is that effective chronic disease management in correctional settings requires innovative approaches and strong institutional support to mitigate health risks and improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals[3].

Correctional nurses routinely navigate complex ethical landscapes. This review meticulously identifies the common dilemmas they face, ranging from patient autonomy versus security mandates to resource allocation inequities. Understanding these ethical tensions is crucial for developing robust institutional policies and providing ethical guidance, which is a cornerstone of effective forensic risk management and ensuring humane care[4].

This quality improvement project offers a practical framework for reducing the use of physical restraints in correctional mental health settings. It shows that by implementing structured assessments, de-escalation training, and consistent monitoring, facilities can significantly minimize restraint incidents. This approach not only enhances patient dignity and safety but also represents a vital component of forensic risk management, reducing potential harm and liability[5].

Correctional nurses play an indispensable role in addressing the opioid crisis within carceral environments. This review illuminates their diverse responsibilities, from screening and assessment to administering medication-assisted treatment and providing harm reduction education. It makes clear that empowering nurses with adequate resources and training is paramount for effective forensic risk management and for improving public health outcomes, both inside and outside prison walls[6].

This scoping review sheds light on the often-overlooked healthcare experiences of transgender individuals in correctional facilities. It reveals systemic barriers, discrimination, and inadequate gender-affirming care. Addressing these issues is not just a matter of human rights; it's a critical aspect of forensic risk management, ensuring equitable access to healthcare, reducing mental health crises, and preventing legal challenges stemming from neglect or mistreatment[7].

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for correctional nurses, forcing rapid adaptations in infection control, patient management, and staff protection. This study chronicles their experiences, revealing both the immense pressures and the innovative strategies employed to safeguard incarcerated populations and healthcare workers. This highlights the indispensable role of robust emergency preparedness and adaptive nursing practices in forensic risk management during public health crises[8].

Telehealth has emerged as a crucial tool for expanding access to healthcare in correctional facilities, mitigating geographic and security barriers. This review explores its implementation and impact, showing how it can enhance mental health services, reduce transport costs, and improve continuity of care. What this really means for forensic risk management is that leveraging technology wisely can improve health outcomes while simultaneously optimizing resources and reducing potential security risks[9].

Chronic pain is a pervasive issue in incarcerated populations, and managing it effectively presents unique challenges in correctional settings. This systematic review identifies best practices and gaps in pain management strategies, underscoring the need for com-

prehensive, patient-centered approaches. Addressing chronic pain not only alleviates suffering but also minimizes self-harm risks and reduces instances of problematic behaviors, making it a key area for forensic risk management and ethical healthcare provision[10].

## Description

Correctional nurses operate within complex environments, often facing significant challenges. Burnout is a prevalent issue among these professionals, with a profound impact on their mental well-being. This necessitates targeted interventions and supportive work environments to mitigate stress, enhance resilience, and ultimately improve the quality of care provided in correctional facilities. Recognizing these stressors is a crucial step in forensic risk management, as nurse well-being directly affects patient safety and operational efficiency [1]. Moreover, managing chronic diseases within prison walls presents unique difficulties due to limited resources and security constraints, affecting the ability to provide consistent, high-quality care. Effective chronic disease management requires innovative approaches and strong institutional support to mitigate health risks and improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals [3]. During public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, correctional nurses encountered unprecedented challenges, compelling rapid adaptations in infection control, patient management, and staff protection. Their experiences highlight the indispensable role of robust emergency preparedness and adaptive nursing practices in forensic risk management [8].

A core aspect of correctional nursing involves navigating complex ethical landscapes. Nurses frequently encounter dilemmas ranging from patient autonomy versus security mandates to resource allocation inequities. Understanding these ethical tensions is crucial for developing sound institutional policies and providing clear ethical guidance, which forms a cornerstone of effective forensic risk management and humane care [4]. A critical area of focus is suicide risk management, where nurse-led interventions are essential for early detection, assessment, and postvention strategies. This work underscores the need for standardized training and robust support systems for nurses, fundamental for reducing forensic risk and improving inmate safety [2]. Furthermore, efforts to minimize physical restraint use in mental health settings offer a practical framework through structured assessments, de-escalation training, and consistent monitoring. This not only enhances patient dignity and safety but also serves as a vital component of forensic risk management, reducing potential harm and liability [5]. Addressing the often-overlooked healthcare experiences of transgender individuals in correctional facilities is also vital, revealing systemic barriers and

inadequate gender-affirming care. This is a critical aspect of forensic risk management, ensuring equitable access, reducing mental health crises, and preventing legal challenges [7].

Correctional nurses play an indispensable role in addressing the opioid crisis within carceral environments. Their diverse responsibilities include screening, assessment, administering medication-assisted treatment, and providing harm reduction education. Empowering nurses with adequate resources and training is paramount for effective forensic risk management and for improving public health outcomes, both inside and outside prison walls [6]. Beyond the opioid crisis, chronic pain is a pervasive issue in incarcerated populations. Effectively managing it presents unique challenges. Systematic reviews identify best practices and highlight gaps in current pain management strategies, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, patient-centered approaches. Addressing chronic pain alleviates suffering, minimizes self-harm risks, and reduces problematic behaviors, making it a key area for forensic risk management and ethical healthcare provision [10]. Therefore, a holistic approach to chronic disease and pain management remains a continuous priority within these specialized healthcare settings.

In an effort to enhance healthcare delivery and overcome systemic barriers, technology has emerged as a crucial tool. Telehealth, for instance, has expanded access to care in correctional facilities by mitigating geographic and security barriers. Its implementation can significantly enhance mental health services, reduce transport costs, and improve continuity of care. Leveraging technology wisely for forensic risk management can improve health outcomes while simultaneously optimizing resources and reducing potential security risks [9]. Ultimately, the various challenges and critical roles outlined across these studies underscore a unifying theme: the urgent need for comprehensive support, advanced training, and innovative policies for correctional nurses. Their capacity to provide quality, ethical, and safe care directly influences the well-being of incarcerated individuals and contributes significantly to overall public health and effective forensic risk management.

## Conclusion

Correctional nurses face substantial challenges, including high rates of burnout impacting mental well-being and patient safety. They are crucial in managing suicide risk, identifying interventions, and providing essential assessments and postvention strategies. Care for chronic diseases within prisons is complicated by limited resources and security constraints, requiring innovative approaches. Ethical dilemmas are frequent, balancing patient autonomy with security,

and demanding clear institutional policies. Nurses also play a key role in public health initiatives, such as minimizing physical restraint use in mental health settings through structured assessments and de-escalation, and tackling the opioid crisis with screening, treatment, and harm reduction. Addressing the healthcare needs of vulnerable populations, like transgender individuals, involves overcoming systemic barriers and discrimination to ensure equitable, gender-affirming care. The profession requires adaptability, as evidenced by nurses' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing rapid infection control and patient management strategies. Technology, like telehealth, offers promise for expanding access, enhancing mental health services, and optimizing resources while reducing security risks. Effective chronic pain management is also vital, reducing self-harm and problematic behaviors. Overall, strengthening support systems, training, and ethical guidance for correctional nurses is paramount for effective forensic risk management and improving inmate health outcomes.

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