# BMJ Open Experiences of COVID-19 patients in a Fangcang shelter hospital in China during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative descriptive study

Yaping Zhong,<sup>1</sup> Huan Zhao,<sup>2</sup> Tsorng-Yeh Lee,<sup>3</sup> Tianchi Yu,<sup>4,5</sup> Ming Fang Liu,<sup>6</sup>

To cite: Zhong Y. Zhao H. Lee T-Y, et al. Experiences of COVID-19 patients in a Fangcang shelter hospital in China during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative descriptive study. BMJ Open 2022;12:e065799. doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2022-065799

Prepublication history and additional supplemental material for this paper are available online. To view these files, please visit the journal online (http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/ bmjopen-2022-065799).

YZ and HZ contributed equally.

YZ and HZ are joint first authors.

Received 17 June 2022 Accepted 23 August 2022



@ Author(s) (or their employer(s)) 2022. Re-use permitted under CC BY-NC. No commercial re-use. See rights and permissions. Published by

For numbered affiliations see end of article.

**Correspondence to** Dr Ji Ji: jiji02232020@gmail.com

#### **ABSTRACT**

**Objectives** This study aimed to examine COVID-19 patients' experiences in a Fangcang shelter hospital in China, to provide insights into the effectiveness of this centralised isolation strategy as a novel solution to patient management during emerging infectious disease

Design This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design. Data were collected by individual semistructured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. Setting This study was undertaken in 1 of the 16 Fangcang shelter hospitals in Wuhan, China between 28 February 2020 and 7 March 2020. Fangcang shelter

hospitals were temporary healthcare facilities intended for large-scale centralised isolation, treatment and disease monitoring of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 cases. These hospitals were an essential component of China's response to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants A total of 27 COVID-19 patients were recruited by purposive sampling. Eligible participants were (1) COVID-19 patients; (2) above 18 years of age and (3) able to communicate effectively. Exclusion criteria were (1) being clinically or emotionally unstable and (2) experiencing communication difficulties.

Results Three themes and nine subthemes were identified, First, COVID-19 patients experienced a range of psychological reactions during hospitalisation, including fear, uncertainty, helplessness and concerns. Second, there were positive and negative experiences associated with communal living. While COVID-19 patients' evaluation of essential services in the hospital was overall positive, privacy and hygiene issues were highlighted as stressors during their hospital stay. Third, positive peer support and a trusting patient-healthcare professional relationship served as a birthplace for resilience, trust and gratitude in COVID-19 patients.

**Conclusions** Our findings suggest that, while sacrificing privacy, centralised isolation has the potential to mitigate negative psychological impacts of social isolation in COVID-19 patients by promoting meaningful peer connections, companionship and support within the shared living space. To our knowledge, this is the first study

#### STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

- ⇒ Qualitative methodology allowed broad exploration and insights about COVID-19 patients' hospitalisation experiences.
- ⇒ Purposive sampling ensured selection of participants with diverse characteristics.
- ⇒ Analyst triangulation involving two experienced qualitative researchers strengthened the methodology.
- ⇒ Potential bias may arise from interviewers also being front-line nurses providing care to participants.
- ⇒ Validation of interview transcripts with participants was impossible due to COVID-19 restrictions.

bringing patients' perspectives into healthcare service appraisal in emergency shelter hospitals.

#### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic has intensely challenged the capacity of healthcare systems worldwide. China has gained much recognition for its prompt and decisive response to COVID-19 during the early stage of the pandemic. An important countermeasure that China implemented against the first wave of COVID-19 was establishment of Fangcang shelter hospitals at the epicentre, the city of Wuhan.<sup>2</sup> Fangcang shelter hospitals, also known as mobile cabin hospitals, were temporary healthcare facilities transformed from existing public venues.<sup>3</sup> They were intended for large-scale centralised isolation, treatment and disease monitoring of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 cases.<sup>2</sup> Between 5 February 2020 and 10 March 2020, a total of 16 Fangcang hospitals were put into use, accommodating over 12000 low-acuity COVID-19 patients.<sup>24</sup> These hospitals, along with other designated hospitals in Wuhan, significantly expanded the city's healthcare capacity and optimised domestic



healthcare resources at the height of the COVID-19 outbreak. $^{3.5}$ 

The concept of Fangcang shelter hospitals was adopted from emergency field hospitals historically used in natural disasters<sup>6</sup> 7 and epidemics.<sup>8</sup> 9 In addition to offering healthcare services, Fangcang hospitals also provided social spaces that aim to enable meaningful connections and resocialisation among COVID-19 patients.<sup>2</sup> This novel large-scale centralised isolation approach against COVID-19, first employed in China, was subsequently adopted by other countries, such as the USA, <sup>10</sup> 11 the UK <sup>12</sup> and Singapore, <sup>13</sup> with various degrees of success.

Previous research on COVID-19 patients' hospitalisation experiences has been skewed towards severe COVID-19 cases<sup>1415</sup> and those treated in traditional hospitals. 16-19 Psychological distress caused by disease factors and social disconnection was highlighted in these inpatients' experiences. 14 16-19 Home or hotel isolation experiences of patients with mild COVID-19 have also been explored. Isolation-induced mental health issues were widely reported in these low-acuity self-caring COVID-19 patients owing to lack of social interaction and poor support for essential living and healthcare. <sup>20 21</sup> Although several countries implemented centralised isolation strategy using repurposed public spaces which resembled Fangcang shelter hospitals, 10 12 13 22 COVID-19 patients' experiences in these temporary facilities remain unexamined.

In China, existing literature on Fangcang hospital inpatients has mainly focused on symptom dynamics, 23-25 treatment strategies, 26-28 and clinical and mental health outcomes<sup>29-31</sup> in this population. Limited data are available illuminating the lived isolation and healthcare experiences of this group during their hospital stay. Understanding COVID-19 patients' hospitalisation experiences in Fangcang shelter hospitals during the very early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic will assist in evaluating the effectiveness of this novel centralised isolation approach in response to public health crisis. Internationally, although large-scale aggressive COVID-19 countermeasures such as establishment of shelter hospitals are unlikely in countries supporting coexistence with COVID-19, such possibility should not be excluded in the future concerning the capricious trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential emergence of new infectious diseases.

In view of the above, this study aimed to explore COVID-19 patients' experiences in a Fangcang hospital in Wuhan, China, during the first wave of COVID-19 in the nation. Evidence generated from this research may inform future centralised patient management in response to large-scale emerging infectious disease epidemics.

#### METHODS Study design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design. The qualitative descriptive approach is most suitable where

a thorough and straight-forward account of events and experiences under investigation is needed.<sup>32</sup> This design is best suited for the current research as it emphasises the subjective nature of COVID-19 patients' experiences and affords a broad insight into their hospital-stay journey.

#### Study setting and participants

This study was undertaken in 1 of the 16 Fangcang shelter hospitals in Wuhan, China during early 2020. At the time of the research, the city of Wuhan was the hardest-hit region by COVID-19 in China, accounting for the majority of all domestic confirmed COVID-19 cases. The Fangcang hospital where this study took place was transformed from the Wuhan Sports Centre Stadium, with a capacity of 1100 beds.

Purposive sampling was used for participant recruitment. Given that COVID-19 patients admitted to Fangcang hospitals were typically mild-to-moderate cases, the inclusion criteria were (1) confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis; (2) above 18 years of age; (3) being able to communicate effectively. Patients who were clinically unstable or experiencing extreme emotional distress or communication difficulties were excluded from this study. Eligible COVID-19 patients were selected by front-line nurses working in the hospital following the maximum variation principle based on their age, gender and the length of hospital stay. The intended sample size was set as above 15 according to the guideline proposed by Guest and Bunce.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, a total of 27 COVID-19 patients with diverse demographic and clinical characteristics were recruited as detailed in table 1.

#### **Data collection**

Semistructured individual face-to-face interviews were conducted between 28 February 2020 and 7 March 2020. All the interviews took place in a quiet room separate from the main patient area with infection prevention procedures rigorously followed. The interviewers were two experienced qualitative researchers (TY and MFL) who were also front-line nurses working in the hospital.

The interview consisted of a set of open-ended questions involving the following topics: (1) feelings and perceptions regarding the COVID-19 diagnosis; (2) experiences and needs during hospitalisation; (3) perceptions of the quality of the services provided in the hospital and (4) overall views and perceptions towards collective isolation (online supplemental appendix A). These open-ended questions were supplemented by probing questions, such as 'Can you please tell me more about that?'. All interviews were audiorecorded. Field notes were taken during interviews to capture non-verbal cues, such as body languages and facial expressions. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 to 32 min (average duration: 25 min). Participant confidentiality was maintained by deidentifying personal information and encrypting data.

Table 1 Demographics of participa	
Demographic characteristics	n (%)
Age	
20–29 years	5 (19)
30-39 years	6 (22)
40-49 years	5 (19)
50-59 years	9 (33)
≥60 years	2 (7)
Gender	
Male	14 (52)
Female	13 (48)
Residence	
Wuhan	24 (89)
Other places	3 (11)
Duration of infection	
12-17 days	9 (33)
18-23 days	12 (45)
24-30 days	6 (22)
Length of hospital stay	
13-16 days	15 (56)
17-20 days	12 (44)
Family member(s) infected	
Yes	11 (41)
No	16 (59)

#### **Data analysis**

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and combined with field notes. Interview transcripts were checked for accuracy before being imported into NVivo V.12 for analysis.

Data analysis was performed by two qualitative researchers (YZ and HZ) independently following the six-step inductive thematic analysis approach described by Clarke et al.<sup>34</sup> Researchers read and reread interview transcripts alongside the field notes and identify patterns of meaning within the data. Phrases and statements of analytical interest were inductively coded and categorised into potential themes. These preliminary themes were jointly reviewed by the researchers against individual data codes and the entire dataset to determine their validity. Modifications were made where necessary. Data saturation was reached at 27 participants. All the themes/ subthemes and relevant quotations were translated into English by YZ and back translated by HZ. The findings were reported according to the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research guideline.<sup>35</sup>

#### Rigour

Several strategies were employed to ensure rigour in this study following the Lincoln et al's four-dimension criteria.<sup>36</sup> First, the interviewers (TY and MFL) were front-line nurses who were familiar with the study settings

and participant backgrounds, and who had expertise in qualitative research. This has enhanced the credibility of the findings. Second, peer debriefing meetings were regularly held within the research team to review transcripts and discuss methodological issues and findings (confirmability). Third, to establish dependability of the results, an audit trail detailing the entire research process was maintained. Finally, to increase transferability of the findings, sufficient details of the study context and participant background information were provided.

#### Patient and public involvement

Neither patients nor the public were involved in the design, or conduct, or reporting, or dissemination plans of this study.

#### **RESULTS**

Three themes and nine subthemes were identified to describe COVID-19 patients' hospitalisation experiences. First, participants experienced a range of psychological reactions during their hospital stay, including fear, uncertainty, helplessness and concerns. Second, there were positive and negative experiences associated with communal living. While COVID-19 patients' evaluation of essential services in the hospital was overall positive, privacy and hygiene issues were highlighted as stressors during hospitalisation. Third, positive peer support and a trusting patient-healthcare professional relationship served as a birthplace for resilience, trust and gratitude in COVID-19 patients.

### Theme 1: COVID-19-related psychological distress

Fear of COVID-19 symptom exacerbation

Participants expressed concerns and fears about potential worsening of COVID-19 symptoms. Those with pre-existing medical conditions were particularly apprehensive about disease exacerbation leading to death. 'I have hypertension and heart disease. I am not sure if these conditions will make my COVID-19 worse. I heard many people died of COVID-19, and this scares me.' (Participant 4).

#### Uncertainty about diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis

Participants reported feelings of uncertainty due to limited knowledge of COVID-19 treatment and prognosis. 'There are so many aspects of this disease (COVID-19) unknown to us...Are there any side effects of the drugs I am taking? Should I discontinue medication after discharge? Can I completely recover?' (Participant 11). Their uncertainty was further exacerbated by the perceived low sensitivity of COVID-19 nucleic acid tests producing false negative results. 'I tested negative for COVID-19 three times before receiving a positive result. I have never felt any COVID-19 symptoms at all. I am still doubtful about my COVID-19 diagnosis.' (Participant 15).

#### Helplessness towards family

Being isolated from family induced a sense of helplessness in participants due to inability to fulfil their caregiver roles. This was particularly relevant when unexpected events occurred in their family. 'My wife is suffering from a schizophrenia relapse. My child is too young to look after himself. I should not be sick right now.' (Participant 23). 'My mother-in-law had a severe stroke and is in ICU now. My wife is stressed. I cannot offer any help, nor can I even comfort my wife in person. I am feeling helpless.' (Participant 12).

#### Concerns about COVID-19-related social stigma post discharge

Participants conveyed their concerns and worries about being stigmatised and subsequently alienated by the community postdischarge. 'People may still think I am a virus carrier even if I am fully recovered from COVID-19.' (Participant 25). 'I feel anxious about returning to work. Who wants a co-worker with a history of COVID-19?' (Participant 20).

### **Theme 2: Communal living and essential needs**Positive experiences

Participants expressed their satisfaction with the basic services offered in the Fangcang hospital. 'It is better than I thought. I have everything I need here.' (Participant 1). The overall living conditions were described as 'functional', 'decent' and 'liveable'. The meals were perceived as 'highly nutritious', 'large size' and 'good taste'. 'I can't complain. The food is so good, better than homemade meals' (Participant 4). Moreover, participants also commented on the mental health benefits of outdoor exercise and a variety of nurse-led activities. 'I enjoy stretching out or walking in the fenced outdoor area. It relaxes me' (Participant 16). 'Nurses taught us to do Tai-Chi, dance, and breathing exercises several times a week...These activities really calmed my anxious thoughts' (Participant 21).

In addition, participants mentioned the usefulness of the WeChat app as a tool to communicate their needs to healthcare workers. 'Whenever I have any questions, I would send a message on WeChat, and they will reply instantly.' (Participant 11). 'It (WeChat) is convenient to both us and the nurses. It saves nurses a trip down the ward when it is not necessary.' (Participant 17).

#### **Negative experiences**

On the other hand, communal living also caused stress due to lack of privacy. 'I feel like living in a huge dormitory where there is hardly any personal space.' (Participant 6). 'I can't sleep properly because of environmental noises and snoring of other patients.' (Participant 25). Hygiene issues were also noted as a stressor. 'I can't take a proper shower because there is no shower equipment in the bathroom.' (Participant 22). 'Although I could manage with sink baths, I still feel uncomfortable.' (Participant 10). 'The toilet is not very clean although they seem to clean it every day' (Participant 3).

## Theme 3: birthplace of resilience, trust and gratitude 'We are all in this together'

Communal living facilitated socialisation among COVID-19 patients. Participants consistently reported

that peer connection broke the monotony of life in isolation and brought forth new mental vigour. 'We chat most of the day, stopping only to eat and sleep, like a bunch of school kids. I feel quite relaxed and happy.' (Participant 24). 'I like chatting with them (patients)...We always remind each other to stay positive.' (Participant 13). This camaraderie progressively built within the patient community helped participants mitigate their disease-induced negative emotions.

'I previously self-isolated at home for 19 days, it was miserable. I felt depressed and hopeless. Now I feel much better since I am surrounded by people who have been through the same journey as me. I am not alone in this fight against COVID-19. We are all in this together. This gives me strength and hope.' (Participant 7)

Also, witnessing fellow patients recovered and discharged from the hospital rekindled a sense of hope in participants. Every time I see someone being discharged, I feel so happy, because that person could be me someday' (Participant 2). 'I believe we will all recover. It is just a matter of time.' (Participant 18).

#### 'I am in good hands'

Participants derived a sense of security from a trusting relationship with healthcare providers. They commented on the level of professionalism shown by clinicians in the hospital. 'They (physicians) are absolutely experts...When I told the doctor my complex medical history, he instantly knew what medications I need... I really feel I am in good hands.' (Participant 5). 'These nurses are very nice and quick to respond...I feel safe here.' (Participant 26). 'Nothing to complain about. They (healthcare workers) work long hours without a break while wearing heavy PPE. They are lifesaving heroes.' (Participant 19). Some participants benefited from the psychological/emotional support offered by healthcare providers. 'The nurse took time to listen to my nervous chatter and comforted me... I felt much better after that.' (Participant 2). 'I felt such a sense of relief after talking to the doctor about my concerns. He reassured me that I would be ok' (Participant 14). In addition, healthcare professionals were seen as a reliable source for COVID-19-related information. 'Social media never tell you the truth (about COVID-19), I only trust what doctors say.' (Participant 8). 'As I know more about this virus from doctors and nurses, I feel less scared' (Participant 1).

#### 'I am unfortunate to get COVID-19 but fortunate to be here'

Participants expressed their gratitude towards front-line healthcare workers in the hospital and policy-makers who proposed establishment of Fangcang hospitals. 'I am unfortunate to get COVID-19 but fortunate to be here...I am safe and well-cared-for by doctors and nurses' (Participant 19). 'Fangcang hospitals are absolutely a wise decision (in response to the COVID-19 outbreak). I would have been miserable if I were still self-isolated at



home.' (Participant 27). This gratitude turned to a sense of national pride in some participants.

'I am so lucky to be a Chinese citizen. I am being treated in a hospital that was built in two days and being taken care of by dedicated healthcare professionals from all over the country. Not everyone in the world is as lucky as I am.' (Participant 9).

#### DISCUSSION

This study illuminated the isolation and healthcare experiences of COVID-19 patients in a Fangcang shelter hospital in Wuhan, China, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings suggest that, while sacrificing privacy, centralised isolation has the capacity to attenuate isolation-induced psychological distress in COVID-19 patients by facilitating meaningful peer connections and support within the shared living space. To our knowledge, this is the first study bringing patients' perspectives into appraisal of healthcare services in emergency shelter hospitals.

#### **COVID-19-related psychological distress**

Mental distress among COVID-19 patients, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic, has been widely reported. 16 17 37 This study, in support of previous research, 18 37 38 revealed that these negative emotions largely stemmed from poor knowledge of the disease, family concerns and the perceived social stigma. Concerning the highly transmissible nature of COVID-19 and absence of targeted therapy, <sup>39</sup> patients' feelings of fear and uncertainty were unsurprising. Perceptions of COVID-19-related social stigma reflects a limited public understanding of this novel infectious disease and the fear surrounding a large-scale outbreak. These findings, consistent with those reported in the context of Wuhan, China, during the first wave of COVID-19, 16 17 19 38 highlighted the necessity of offering psychological care and family support to these emotionally vulnerable low-acuity COVID-19 patients. It is also suggested that increasing public knowledge about COVID-19 and addressing misinformation may facilitate reintegration of recovered COVID-19 patients into the community.<sup>38</sup>

### **Communal living and essential needs**

Fangcang shelter hospitals were built in extreme conditions and intended to fulfil COVID-19 patients' both medical and non-medical needs.<sup>2</sup> Our study reported an overall satisfactory level of care and services provided in the hospital as evaluated by the inpatients. Previous studies in Australia<sup>40</sup> and Nepal<sup>41</sup> reported that limited in-hospital mobility and inadequate communication with healthcare provides were major complaints of hospitalised COVID-19 patients. In contrast to these, Fangcang hospitals attended to inpatients' mobility needs by providing spacious fenced outdoor exercise area and arranging various nurse-led physical activities. Further, the use of

WeChat platform facilitated effective patient—healthcare worker communication. The WeChat app has been widely used in various healthcare settings in China to support patient care. 42–44 This study demonstrates the usefulness of WeChat in managing isolated patients with an infectious disease in a shelter hospital environment. Concerning the heavy workload and a high risk of COVID-19 infection faced by front-line healthcare workers, 45 this communication tool served as a functional alternative to the face-to-face healthcare delivery, allowing patients' needs to be known and addressed in a timely manner.

This study also reported multiple stressors associated with communal living. Consistent with prior research on field hospitals in the contexts of COVID-19 11 and natural disasters, 46 insufficient sanitary facilities leading to poor hygiene of inpatients was noted in this study. Inadequate hygiene not only affects patients' physical comfort, but is also a known cause of hospital-acquired infections.<sup>47</sup> Although Fangcang shelter hospitals were built for emergency purpose and only served as temporary isolation centres, ensuring availability of essential hygiene services may benefit patients' overall health and recovery. Additionally, lack of personal space and environmental noises were also stressors experienced by Fangcang hospital inpatients. The physical environment of a hospital, such as lighting, noises and layout, is known to affect patients' physical and mental health.<sup>48</sup> Our findings suggest that, although Fangcang hospitals were intended as temporary infrastructure against public health crisis, a balance needs to be achieved between maximising the use of space and ensuring patient comfort and privacy, to improves its feasibility as shelters for people.

#### Resilience, trust and gratitude

Communal living facilitated socialisation and peer connections among COVID-19 patients. The detrimental psychological, emotional and behavioural impacts of prolonged social isolation have been widely reported, including depression, feelings of loneliness, irritability and self-harm behaviours. 49-52 Previous studies in the contexts of SARS<sup>53</sup> and COVID-19<sup>40</sup> indicated that social isolation exacerbated the disease-associated mental distress in hospitalised patients. Our findings mirrored those of Li et al,<sup>54</sup> suggesting that, in contrast to singleroom isolation, the shared space in the Fangcang hospital promoted peer interaction and support within the patient community, which mitigated the unintended negative mental health impacts of isolation. According to WHO,<sup>55</sup> health is defined as a state of physical, psychological and social well-being. As demonstrated in this study, fulfilment of social needs of isolated patients can potentially benefit their physical and mental recovery. A socially and emotionally connected patient community, as evidenced by our findings, may serve as the birthplace of hope and resilience in combating an infectious disease.

The reassurance and support gained from healthcare professionals also helped alleviate stress in COVID-19 patients in this study. In line with prior research, 4 56



healthcare professionals were seen as a reliable source for COVID-19-related information. This is particularly pertinent during the very early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic when public knowledge about COVID-19 was limited and mainly acquired from social media. In addition to fulfilling COVID-19 patients' information needs, healthcare providers also attended to patients' psychological and emotional needs. Several studies highlighted the critical role of healthcare professionals in promoting resilience in patients with cancer,<sup>57</sup> rare diseases<sup>58</sup> and infectious diseases.<sup>59</sup> In support of these, this study demonstrated that healthcare professionals allowed COVID-19 patients regain a sense of security and hope amidst the uncertainty surrounding their health conditions. This regained security promoted trust in the therapeutic relationship and brought a sense of gratitude.

#### **Practical implications and future research**

Using the COVID-19 pandemic as a context, our study provided a valuable insight into the shelter hospital-based centralised isolation strategy as an innovative solution to public health crisis response. It is suggested that, while compromising on privacy, centralised isolation has the potential to mitigate isolation-induced mental distress in patients by promoting meaningful peer connections, companionship and support within the shared living space.

Several supportive strategies may be implemented to improve the feasibility of this public health intervention for future epidemics or disasters. Health administrators should develop strategies to address privacy and hygiene issues in daily operation of shelter hospitals. Adequate sanitation should be guaranteed to prevent secondary infections in hospitalised patients. Moreover, adequate emotional/psychological care should be offered to inpatients. It is important that a multidisciplinary team involving physicians, nurses, counsellors and social workers work collaboratively to identify and address patients' multifaceted needs. This includes coordinating community services that support isolated patients' family needs.

Future in-depth qualitative studies are needed to examine the effectiveness of this centralised isolation strategy in different contexts from the inpatients' perspective. Comparative evidence across countries on the impacts of different isolation strategies on COVID-19 patients are warranted to inform future public health response to particularly large-scale infectious disease outbreaks.

#### **Limitations**

This study has potential limitations. First, the sample may not be representative of the population (all COVID-19 patients admitted to Fangcang shelter hospitals) due to single-site sampling and self-selection bias. Specifically, this study only examined COVID-19 patients treated in 1 of the 16 Fangcang shelter hospitals and those who were emotionally stable and potentially had a pre-existing

interest in sharing their experiences. Second, the interviewers were front-line nurses known to participants in the Fangcang hospital. The inherent imbalance of power in the therapeutic relationship may affect participants' responses. For example, participants may feel inclined to respond in a positive and agreeable manner based on perceived concerns that it would impact their medical care. Additionally, it was possible that front-line nurses unconsciously selected patients with certain personality traits such as sociability and friendliness. Nevertheless, several strategies were implemented to reduce respondent and interviewer bias, including the interviewers adhering to the inclusion and exclusion criteria when recruiting participants, and clarifying the purpose of the research and the anonymous nature of participation to respondents prior to interview. Third, owing to the COVID-19 restrictions imposed, it was impossible to conduct member-checking with participants to validate the interview transcripts.

#### CONCLUSION

Through in-depth qualitative analysis of COVID-19 patients' experiences in a Fangcang shelter hospital, this study shed light on the effectiveness of a novel centralised isolation strategy implemented in China during the very early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is suggested that collective isolation has the capacity to fulfil patients' physical, psychological and social needs. Future research is needed to inform a comprehensive understanding of this centralised isolation approach across different contexts.

#### **Author affiliations**

<sup>1</sup>Academic Nursing Unit, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, East Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Innovation, Science and Sustainability, Federation University Australia - Berwick Campus, Berwick, Victoria, Australia

<sup>3</sup>School of Nursing, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<sup>4</sup>Department of Nephrology and Urology, Sir Run Run Hospital Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China

<sup>5</sup>Kidney Disease Centre, Zhejiang University School of Medicine First Affiliated Hospital, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

<sup>6</sup>Operation Room, Sir Run Run Hospital Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing, Jiangsu,

<sup>7</sup>Department of Nursing, Shandong Provincial Hospital Affiliated to Shandong First Medical University, 250021 Jinan, Shandong, China

**Correction notice** This article has been corrected since it first published. The affiliation for 'Ji Ji' has been updated.

**Acknowledgements** We express our sincere gratitude towards front-line nurses who helped with participant recruitment and all the study participants.

**Contributors** All authors were involved in the design of this study. TY and MFL were responsible for participant recruitment and data collection. YZ and HZ were responsible for data analysis and were the co-lead writers of the manuscript. T-YL and JJ had oversight of data collection and analysis and were coordinating writers of the manuscript. YZ and HZ contributed equally and share the first authorship. JJ is responsible for the overall content as guarantor.

**Funding** This work was supported by Shandong First Medical University, China (Grant No. 921001)

Competing interests None declared.

Patient and public involvement Patients and/or the public were not involved in the design, or conduct, or reporting, or dissemination plans of this research.



Patient consent for publication Not applicable.

Ethics approval This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Sir Run Run Hospital, Nanjing Medical University, China via an expedited pathway (2020-SR-005). Due to the COVID-19 restrictions imposed, acquisition of individual written informed consent was impossible. Instead, we obtained verbal informed consent from each participant which was audiorecorded. During the individual consent process, potential participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of participation.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement** The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Supplemental material This content has been supplied by the author(s). It has not been vetted by BMJ Publishing Group Limited (BMJ) and may not have been peer-reviewed. Any opinions or recommendations discussed are solely those of the author(s) and are not endorsed by BMJ. BMJ disclaims all liability and responsibility arising from any reliance placed on the content. Where the content includes any translated material, BMJ does not warrant the accuracy and reliability of the translations (including but not limited to local regulations, clinical guidelines, terminology, drug names and drug dosages), and is not responsible for any error and/or omissions arising from translation and adaptation or otherwise.

Open access This is an open access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial (CC BY-NC 4.0) license, which permits others to distribute, remix, adapt, build upon this work non-commercially, and license their derivative works on different terms, provided the original work is properly cited, appropriate credit is given, any changes made indicated, and the use is non-commercial. See: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/.

#### ORCID ID

Ji Ji http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8033-8145

#### **REFERENCES**

- 1 Gao J, Zhang P. China's Public Health Policies in Response to COVID-19: From an "Authoritarian" Perspective. Front Public Health 2021:9:756677.
- 2 Chen S, Zhang Z, Yang J, et al. Fangcang shelter hospitals: a novel concept for responding to public health emergencies. Lancet 2020;395:1305–14.
- 3 Fang D, Pan S, Li Z, et al. Large-Scale public venues as medical emergency sites in disasters: lessons from COVID-19 and the use of Fangcang shelter hospitals in Wuhan, China. BMJ Glob Health 2020;5:e002815.
- 4 Zhong Y, Liu W, Lee T-Y, et al. Risk perception, knowledge, information sources and emotional states among COVID-19 patients in Wuhan, China. Nurs Outlook 2021;69:13–21.
- 5 Li J, Yuan P, Heffernan J, et al. Fangcang shelter hospitals during the COVID-19 epidemic, Wuhan, China. Bull World Health Organ 2020;98:830–41.
- 6 Wang K-W, Gao J, Song X-X, et al. Fangcang shelter hospitals are a one health approach for responding to the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China. One Health 2020;10:100167.
- 7 Albukrek D, Mendlovic J, Marom T. Typhoon Haiyan disaster in the Philippines: paediatric field Hospital perspectives. *Emerg Med J* 2014;31:951–3.
- 8 Lamb LE, Cox AT, Fletcher T, et al. Formulating and improving care while mitigating risk in a military Ebola virus disease treatment unit. J R Army Med Corps 2017;163:2–6.
- 9 The AF. Influenza epidemic in New York City: a review of the public health response. Public Health Rep. 2010;125 Suppl 1918;3:71–9.
- 10 Levy N, Zucco L, Ehrlichman RJ, et al. Development of rapid response capabilities in a large COVID-19 alternate care site using failure modes and effect analysis with in situ simulation. Anesthesiology 2020;133:985–96.
- 11 Brady K, Milzman D, Walton E. Uniformed services and the field Hospital experience during coronovirus disease 2019 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic: open to closure in 30 days with 1,100 patients: the Javits New York medical station. *Mil Med* 2021:usab003.
- 12 de Val J, Sohal G, Sarwar A, et al. Investigating the challenges and opportunities for medicines management in an NHS field Hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eur J Hosp Pharm 2021;28:10–15.
- 13 Goei A, Leadership F. Community care Facility—A novel concept to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic: a Singaporean Institution's experience. J Public Health Manag Pract 2020;26:613–21.

- 14 Norouzadeh R, Abbasinia M, Tayebi Z, et al. Experiences of patients with COVID-19 admitted to the intensive care units: a qualitative study. J Patient Exp 2021;8:237437352110073.
- 15 Kürtüncü M, Kurt A, Arslan N. The experiences of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units: a qualitative study. OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying 2021;0(0:00302228211024120.
- 16 Li T, Hu Y, Xia L, et al. Psychological experience of patients with confirmed COVID-19 at the initial stage of pandemic in Wuhan, China: a qualitative study. BMC Public Health 2021;21:2257.
- 17 Wang J-Y, Wei L-L, Li H-T, et al. A qualitative exploration of the psychological experience of patients hospitalized with COVID-19. Holist Nurs Pract 2022;36:37–45.
- 18 Cervantes L, Martin M, Frank MG, et al. Experiences of Latinx individuals hospitalized for COVID-19: a qualitative study. JAMA Netw Open 2021:4:e210684.
- 19 Sun N, Wei L, Wang H, et al. Qualitative study of the psychological experience of COVID-19 patients during hospitalization. J Affect Disord 2021;278:15–22.
- 20 He Q, Du F, Simonse LWL. A patient journey map to improve the home isolation experience of persons with mild COVID-19: design research for service Touchpoints of artificial intelligence in eHealth. JMIR Med Inform 2021:9:e23238-e:e23238.
- 21 Akbarbegloo M, Sanaeefar M, Majid P, et al. Psychosocial care experiences of patients with COVID-19 at home in Iran: a qualitative study. *Health Soc Care Community* 2022;30:264–74.
- 22 Sacchetto D, Raviolo M, Beltrando C, et al. COVID-19 surge capacity solutions: our experience of converting a concert Hall into a temporary Hospital for mild and moderate COVID-19 patients. Disaster Med Public Health Prep 2020:1–4.
- 23 Wang X, Fang J, Zhu Y, et al. Clinical characteristics of non-critically ill patients with novel coronavirus infection (COVID-19) in a Fangcang Hospital. Clin Microbiol Infect 2020;26:1063–8.
- 24 Yang W, Cao Q, Qin L, et al. Clinical characteristics and imaging manifestations of the 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19): A multi-center study in Wenzhou city, Zhejiang, China. J Infect 2020:80:388–93.
- 25 Lu C, Wang H-Y, Chen X, et al. Clinical characteristics of 1327 patients with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the largest Fangcang shelter hospital in Wuhan. Chin Med J 2021;134:241–2.
- 26 Wu S, Xue L, Legido-Quigley H, et al. Understanding factors influencing the length of hospital stay among non-severe COVID-19 patients: a retrospective cohort study in a Fangcang shelter Hospital. PLoS One 2020;15:e0240959.
- 27 Zheng T, Yang C, Wang H-Y, et al. Clinical characteristics and outcomes of COVID-19 patients with gastrointestinal symptoms admitted to Jianghan Fangcang shelter hospital in Wuhan, China. J Med Virol 2020;92:2735–41.
- 28 Yan N, Wang W, Gao Y, et al. Medium term follow-up of 337 patients with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in a Fangcang shelter hospital in Wuhan, China. Front Med 2020;7.
- 29 Dai L-L, Wang X, Jiang T-C, et al. Anxiety and depressive symptoms among COVID-19 patients in Jianghan Fangcang shelter hospital in Wuhan, China. PLoS One 2020;15:e0238416.
- 30 Gu Y, Zhu Y, Xu F, et al. Factors associated with mental health outcomes among patients with COVID-19 treated in the Fangcang shelter hospital in China. Asia Pac Psychiatry 2021;13:e12443.
- 31 Zhang G-Y, Liu Q, Lin J-Y, et al. Mental health outcomes among patients from Fangcang shelter hospitals exposed to coronavirus disease 2019: an observational cross-sectional study. Chronic Dis Transl Med 2021;7:57–64.
- 32 Doyle L, McCabe C, Keogh B, et al. An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. J Res Nurs 2020;25:443–55.
- 33 Guest G, Bunce A, Johnson L. How many interviews are enough? an experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods* 2006;18:59–82.
- 34 Clarke V, Braun V, Hayfield N. Thematic analysis. In: Smith JA, ed. Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods. 3rd ed. London: SAGE, 2015: 222–48.
- 35 O'Brien BC, Harris IB, Beckman TJ, et al. Standards for reporting qualitative research: a synthesis of recommendations. Acad Med 2014;89:1245–51.
- 36 Lincoln YS, Guba EG, Pilotta JJ. Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985: 9. 438–9.
- 37 Lu J, Zhao M, Wu Q, et al. Mental health needs of the COVID-19 patients and staff in the Fangcang shelter Hospital: a qualitative research in Wuhan, China. Glob Ment Health 2021;8:e33.
- 38 Pei H, Wu Q, Xie Y, et al. A qualitative investigation of the psychological experiences of COVID-19 patients receiving inpatient care in isolation. *Clin Nurs Res* 2021;30:1113–20.



- 39 Baden LR, Rubin EJ. Covid-19 The Search for Effective Therapy. N Engl J Med 2020;382:1851–2.
- 40 Shaban RZ, Nahidi S, Sotomayor-Castillo C, et al. SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19: the lived experience and perceptions of patients in isolation and care in an Australian healthcare setting. Am J Infect Control 2020;48:1445–50.
- 41 Bastola A, Dhital R, Shah R, et al. Experiences of COVID-19 patients admitted in a government infectious disease hospital in Nepal and its implications for health system strengthening: a qualitative study. PLoS One 2021;16:e0261524.
- 42 Chen X, Zhou X, Li H, et al. The value of WeChat application in chronic diseases management in China. Comput Methods Programs Biomed 2020;196:105710.
- 43 Shen L, Wang S, Chen W, et al. Understanding the function constitution and influence factors on communication for the WeChat official account of top tertiary hospitals in China: cross-sectional study. J Med Internet Res 2019;21:e13025.
- 44 Ni Z, Liu C, Wu B, et al. An mHealth intervention to improve medication adherence among patients with coronary heart disease in China: development of an intervention. Int J Nurs Sci 2018;5:322–30.
- 45 Zhou Y, Wang W, Sun Y, et al. The prevalence and risk factors of psychological disturbances of frontline medical staff in China under the COVID-19 epidemic: workload should be concerned. J Affect Disord 2020;277:510–4.
- 46 Margalit G, Rosen Y, Tekes-Manova D, et al. Recommendations for nursing requirements at a field hospital, based on the Israel Defense Forces field hospital at the earthquake disaster in Turkey--August 1999. Accid Emerg Nurs 2002;10:217–20.
- 47 Dancer SJ. The role of environmental cleaning in the control of hospital-acquired infection. J Hosp Infect 2009;73:378–85.
- 48 ERCM H, Morales E, van Hoof J, et al. Healing environment: a review of the impact of physical environmental factors on users. Building and Environment 2012;58:70–80.

- 49 Barratt RL, Shaban R, Moyle W. Patient experience of source isolation: lessons for clinical practice. *Contemp Nurse* 2011;39:180–93.
- 50 Brooks SK, Webster RK, Smith LE, et al. The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. The Lancet 2020;395:912–20.
- 51 Siddiqui ZK, Conway SJ, Abusamaan M, et al. Patient isolation for infection control and patient experience. *Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol* 2019;40:194–9.
- 52 Qiu J, Shen B, Zhao M, et al. A nationwide survey of psychological distress among Chinese people in the COVID-19 epidemic: implications and policy recommendations. Gen Psychiatr 2020;33:e100213-e:e100213.
- 53 Cheng SKW, Wong CW, Tsang J, et al. Psychological distress and negative appraisals in survivors of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Psychol Med 2004;34:1187–95.
- 54 Li J, Shu Y, Chen N. 'Re-socialisation' in isolated spaces: A case study on the social organisation of Fangcang shelter hospital patients under extreme spatial conditions. *Indoor and Built Environment* 2020:1–14.
- 55 Constitution WHO. Who remains firmly committed to the principles set out in the preamble to the constitution: World health organisation, 2022. Available: https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution
- 56 Ko N-Y, Lu W-H, Chen Y-L, et al. COVID-19-related information sources and psychological well-being: an online survey study in Taiwan. Brain Behav Immun 2020;87:153–4.
- 57 Molina Y, Yi JC, Martinez-Gutierrez J, et al. Resilience among patients across the cancer continuum: diverse perspectives. Clin J Oncol Nurs 2014;18:93–101.
- 58 Haylen D. Women's experiences of living with a rare disease, lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM): A life history study. Sydney, Australia: The University of Sydney, 2016.
- 69 O'Sullivan TL, Phillips KP. From SARS to pandemic influenza: the framing of high-risk populations. *Nat Hazards* 2019;98:103–17.