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The challenges of nursing as a care coordinator in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic

Los retos de la enfermería como coordinadora de los cuidados en la pandemia del COVID-19

Os desafios da enfermagem como coordenadora do cuidado frente à pandemia da COVID-19

ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe the experience of nurses who work in the front line to combat COVID-19 in the countryside and capital scenarios of the state of Ceará. **Método:** Trata-se de um estudo descritivo, com abordagem qualitativa, tipo de relato de experiência, elaborado a partir das experiências vivenciadas por enfermeiros que atuam na linha de frente ao combate a COVID-19 no contexto da Atenção Primária à Saúde (APS). This report presents as a temporal cut, the activities developed by nurses during the period from March to June 2020. The collection of information for the writing of the report took place in the month of July 2020. **Results:** In view of this context, it is possible to select the results in two dimensions: in the units in which the authors of this work experience the Pandemic: Services operating flows and Challenges and potentialities experienced. **Conclusion:** It is worth noting that the nurses in this study are on the front line, demonstrating their commitment to confronting COVID-19.

DESCRIPTORS: Pandemic; Coronavirus; Coronavirus infections; Nursing.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Describir la experiencia de las enfermeras que trabajan en la primera línea de combate al COVID-19 en los escenarios del campo y de la capital del estado de Ceará. **Método:** Se trata de un estudio descriptivo, con enfoque cualitativo, tipo informe de experiencia, elaborado a partir de las vivencias de las enfermeras que trabajan en primera línea para combatir el COVID-19 en el contexto de la Atención Primaria de Salud (APS). Este informe presenta en forma de corte de tiempo, las actividades desarrolladas por las enfermeras durante el periodo de marzo a junio de 2020. La recogida de información para la redacción del informe tuvo lugar en julio de 2020. **Resultados:** A la vista de este contexto, es posible seleccionar los resultados en dos dimensiones: en las unidades en las que los autores de este trabajo viven la pandemia: Flujos operativos de los servicios y Desafíos y potencialidades vividas. **Conclusión:** Cabe destacar que las enfermeras de este estudio están en primera línea, demostrando su compromiso a la hora de enfrentarse al COVID-19.

DESCRIPTORES: Pandemia; Coronavirus; Infecciones por coronavirus; Enfermería.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Descrever a experiência de enfermeiros que atuam na linha de frente ao combate da COVID-19 nos cenários do interior e capital do estado do Ceará. **Método:** Trata-se de um estudo descritivo, com abordagem qualitativa, tipo relato de experiência, elaborado a partir das experiências vivenciadas por enfermeiros que atuam na linha de frente no combate a COVID-19 no contexto da Atenção Primária à Saúde (APS). Tal relato apresenta como recorte temporal, as atividades desenvolvidas pelas enfermeiras durante o período de março a junho de 2020. A coleta das informações para a escrita do relato se deu no mês de julho de 2020. **Resultados:** À vista desse contexto, é possível selecionar os resultados em duas dimensões: nas unidades na qual os autores deste trabalho vivenciam a Pandemia: Fluxos operantes dos serviços e Desafios e potencialidades vivenciadas. **Conclusão:** Vale destacar que os enfermeiros deste estudo estão na linha de frente, demonstrando seu compromisso no enfrentamento da COVID-19.

DESCRIPTORES: Pandemia; Coronavirus; Infecções por Coronavirus; Enfermagem.

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INTRODUCTION

Named SARS-CoV-2, the new Coronavirus, which causes the disease COVID-19, was detected on December 31st, 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed the circulation of the new Coronavirus on January 9th, 2020. ⁽¹⁾ Therefore, it declared the disease as a Public Health Emergency of international importance, being considered a pandemic as of March, due to the various outbreaks that occurred in several countries of the world. ⁽²⁾

In Brazil, the Ministry of Health (MH) confirmed the first case of the disease on February 26th. After that date, the speed of propagation occurred at alarming levels of contamination throughout the country. ⁽³⁾ With the appearance of the new virus, it became a challenge in the face of the existing surveillance structure in the national territory, especially at the moment when the reduction of invest-

ments of the Unified Health System (SUS). The research enables the capacity for early detection and response to the disease. ⁽⁴⁾

According to the latest epidemiological bulletin of the State of Ceará, published in early February 2021, an increasing number of cases is observed, with an accumulated mortality rate in the year 2020 and 2021 of 116,2 per 100 thousand inhabitants. Still in this same document, he mentions that in the current year the mortality rate is 3,6 deaths per 100 thousand inhabitants, with emphasis on some regions of the interior that presented great increases when compared to previous weeks. ⁽⁵⁾ With the impact caused since the beginning by the pandemic, abrupt changes in the routines of the health institutions were caused and along with this the process of adaptation of the health professionals in face of the new scenario of health crisis.

In this context, nursing is a prominent profession for acting on the front line against COVID-19, provi-

ding their care continuously, facing ineffective work conditions, without support that guarantee their individual protection and, therefore, bringing reflections about your importance as a member of a health team that works to prevent, restore and save lives. ⁽⁶⁾

The practices that comprise the work process of nursing professionals, as well as the need to restructure Primary Health Care, bring to light the various challenges that need to be seen as a priority and which are neglected by the Federal Government. With this current situation, it became evident the importance of having a robust public health system, with a comprehensive capacity to meet the various existing demands, regardless of the established scenario, the relevance of SUS and its health workers for the sustainability of the State, guaranteeing to provide social welfare for the population as a whole. ⁽⁷⁾

Thus, the objective of this study was to describe the experience of nurses working in the front line to combat

COVID-19 in the countryside and capital of the state of Ceará. This research is relevant for health professionals and academics, as well as for society in general. It is justified, therefore, the understanding of the work performed by nurses, helps to outline strategies for coping with this health crisis caused by the coronavirus in the individual and collective contexts.

METHODS

It is a descriptive study, with a qualitative approach, type of experience report, elaborated from the experiences lived by nurses who work in the front line to combat COVID-19 in the context of Primary Health Care (PHC). The report presents as a time frame, the activities developed by nurses during the period from March to June 2020. The collection of information for the writing of the report took place in the month of July 2020.

As inclusion criteria, the reports, observations and experiences lived by nurses in relation to their activities and activities were used, taking into account the management of care, people, materials and flows in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their experiences associated with stress, pressure and the challenges of dealing with the job, plus the risk of falling ill.

The activities were experienced in a Basic Care Unit (UAB - Unidade de Atendimento Básico), belonging to the municipality of Maracanaú and in a Basic Health Unit (UBS), belonging to the municipality of General Sampaio, both in the State of Ceará.

The UAB was opened in April 2018 and is open 24 hours a day. The unit provides assistance only to patients residing in the municipality and works as a rearguard. It is located in the complex of the Municipal Hospital Dr. João Elísio de Holanda with medical and nursing teams being aimed at low-risk patients, that is, it assumes less serious care. This service was presen-

ted as a reference for the treatment of COVID-19.

UBS, on the other hand, has only one nursing team that works providing outpatient care, nursing consultation services within primary care programs and health surveillance for low-risk patients. This service was presented as a reference for the treatment of COVID-19 through the reception of symptomatic patients, active search for and monitoring of contacts. Thus, it still performs the reception and primary screening, and directs these patients within the health care network, referring them to medical evaluations and carrying out the rapid test for COVID-19.

The data reported here reflect the face-to-face experience, which emerged from reports, observations, studies and discussions among the professionals in the internal structure of the institutions where their work activities were carried out. As the present study is an experience report, it was not necessary to use the Informed Consent Form (ICF), as well as sending it for approval by an Ethics and Research Committee (CEP - Comitê de Ética e Pesquisa).

RESULTS

In view of this pandemic context, it is possible to select the results in two dimensions. Firstly, the Flows operating in the services, which comprise the moment when the units were referred to the population as a gateway to fight the coronavirus. Still, it was decided by the health services coordinators that workers belonging to the risk group, the elderly and people with chronic diseases, should be removed or relocated to other sectors of the institution. Those who had respiratory symptoms were ruled out and tested for COVID-19.

The institutions in this study provided an exclusive area for the care of these cases, providing care separately from other patients. They adopted

isolation measures in order to provide isolated assistance in these cases, reserving the teams available for care.

The second dimension refers to the Challenges and potentialities experienced, an axis that brings a reflection considering the increase in the consumption of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) with the epidemic of COVID-19. Thus, a major concern of the nursing team was with the need for rationalization and the possibility of the lack of these materials in the units. In addition to the intense routine, in which the professionals were exposed to their apprehension for not having complete control over the proper use of PPE's, it became more challenging to act for the entire team.

The units in this report did not conduct necessary discussions among health workers regarding measures to improve working conditions during this period. As well as they did not carry out training to strengthen the knowledge of the dangers and acquisition of safe behavior in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, making this period even more challenging, bringing physical and psychological repercussions for these professionals.

DISCUSSION

WHO defined 2020 as the year for nursing professionals, which would be a global celebration.⁽⁸⁾ However, the working class goes through several challenging scenarios in the face of this pandemic situation of COVID-19.

With the arrival of this pandemic scenario in our daily care in basic health units, one of the biggest concerns of professional nurses focused on how to provide care to patients who entered the services as being suspected or confirmed cases for COVID-19.⁽⁹⁾

However, it is known that COVID-19 has become one of the biggest challenges within healthcare practices, since it has a high potential for rapid contagion, and is also considered lethal.

Without defined protocols for the control and combat of this virus, it ends up generating doubts and apprehensions, mainly due to the recurrent changes in the attendance flows.⁽¹⁰⁾

As a result, the institutional protocols for dealing with suspected and confirmed cases for COVID-19 are constantly changing, which creates greater challenges for nurses in directing their care actions.⁽¹¹⁾ Until the conclusion of the present report, the flow occurred through a rapid screening performed by a nurse and, after that, it was referred according to its symptomatic severity, which could be directed to treatment and home isolation. Thus, he was accompanied by the family health team or continued to the secondary network with greater assistance support.

In view of the current epidemiological context, clinical management in primary care must be carried out in a thorough manner, with an accurate assessment of symptoms, since PHC is the gateway to SUS and has a fundamental role in the global response to the disease, offering resolute care with full capacity for early identification of serious cases that should be referred to the specialized service.⁽¹²⁾

Within this perspective, it is essential to standardize standard flows within the Health Care Network (RAS - Rede de Atenção à Saúde) in order to determine uniform and organized care in all health institutions.⁽¹³⁾

The MH also recommends the fast flow, optimizing the service upon arrival and establishing a priority level for them, having a doctor, a nurse and a nursing technician available for assistance, as well as the exclusive area is also considered as an absolute and indispensable recommendation.⁽¹⁴⁾

Thus, the health service has a duty to provide training for all health professionals to prevent the transmission of infectious agents. All health professionals must be trained in the correct and safe use of PPE.⁽¹⁵⁾

This pandemic is alerted to the mental health of nursing professionals, who are at increased risk for the development of Burnout syndrome, since fear, insecurity and apprehension were prevalent among them as the disease progressed. The WHO recently published a guide to guide mental health care for different groups, including health professionals. For health workers, dealing with their work, plus the risk of falling ill, causes severe mental health problems.⁽¹⁶⁾

The distance from family members, fear and stress due to unexpected changes in routine (where the category is put to the test in the face of a major health crisis) ends up impacting physical, emotional and psychological consequences in the face of the daily challenge of dealing with significant numbers of infected and deaths from the disease.⁽¹⁷⁾

In turn, the work of the nursing team requires technical and scientific competence, knowledge, skill and emotional control over the practice, considering that the assistance presents situations of risk, physical and emotional exhaustion, responsibilities with people's lives and coping with fears and suffering. This whole situation has a negative impact on job satisfaction, resulting in losses in care, quality of care and patient safety.⁽¹⁸⁾

Among nursing professionals, in line with the literature, the triggering factors for depression may be related to the work process, such as the shift, the relationship between professional-patient, professional-family and professional-professional, work overload, wear, social support, conflict of interest and coping strategies developed.⁽¹⁹⁻²⁰⁾

The pressure to deal with the job and the risk of becoming ill strengthens a state of psychological vulnerability among nursing professionals working in the units studied, in addition to the economic and labor concerns related to the recommendations for social distance.⁽²¹⁾ In addition, there is the insecurity resulting from

the frequent updates in the care flows and health protocols, which interrupt and change the work routine of the health teams.

The nursing professional has always worked without conditions to perform his best role. Outdated wages, structures that do not offer minimum working conditions, such as the low availability of protective materials.⁽²²⁾ The lack of PPE's is commonplace in our work processes. Thus, the population must be aware that COVID-19 will not bring ease to Nursing, however, as in the other epidemics experienced in their daily care, the category is willing to face this storm with technique, science and professionalism.

CONCLUSION

The present report showed the experiences of nurses working in Primary Health Care in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in two aspects that concern regional standards in the state of Ceará. Its development allowed us to understand that, even in moments of commotion, the nursing team (re) invented actions to guarantee health care to users.

Bearing in mind that the virus was recently discovered and that studies on the subject are still under development, considering its magnitude, the protocols and recommendations undergo constant changes. It is worth mentioning that the nurses in this study are at the forefront, demonstrating their commitment to coping with COVID-19. In this way, it is emphasized, the relevance of maintaining continuous technical-scientific updating for the proper use of barriers to exposure, as well as the adjustments in the structure of the operational flows of services.

Therefore, it aims to stimulate the socialization of experiences and to emphasize the need for the recognition of nursing professionals, since they have large workloads, unmatched

remuneration and, even so, they assume the challenges of being on the front line in fight against the new co-

ronavirus. Therefore, it is important to recognize the complexity of the work of the Nurse and the entire nur-

sing team, since they have the care and maintenance of the populations' health as militancy. ■

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