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New diseases and old threats: the impact of COVID-19 on tuberculosis management

Nuevas enfermedades y viejas amenazas: el impacto de la COVID-19 en el manejo de la tuberculosis

Novas doenças e ameaças antigas: a repercussão da COVID-19 no manejo da tuberculose

ABSTRACT

This reflection aimed to discuss the interference of fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in the maintenance of tuberculosis management and control actions in Brazil, highlighting the crucial role of nursing in this process. TB is considered an important public health problem in the country, which registered, in 2019, more than 73 thousand new cases and about 4500 deaths due to the disease in 2018. In these unusual times, when COVID-19 dominates health practices, due to the enormous impact that both TB and COVID-19 have, it is necessary to reinforce the existence and coexistence of both TB and COVID-19, to take into account the organization of the health system and the fundamental role of nursing in order to manage adequately affected people and prevent the further spread of both diseases. Therefore, the importance of raising individual information of people undergoing TB treatment in the various services of the SUS care network is reinforced, adapting the forms of contact and bonding according to the possibilities of the services and people affected by the disease.

DESCRIPTORS: Coronavirus Infections; Communicable Diseases; Public Health Surveillance; Tuberculosis.

RESUMEN

Esta reflexión tuvo como objetivo discutir la interferencia frente a la pandemia de la COVID-19 en el mantenimiento de las acciones de atención y control de la tuberculosis en Brasil, destacando el papel crucial de la enfermería en este proceso. La tuberculosis se considera un importante problema de salud pública en el país, que registró, en 2019, más de 73 mil casos nuevos y alrededor de 4500 muertes debido a la enfermedad en 2018. En estos tiempos inusuales, cuando la COVID-19 domina las prácticas de salud, debido al enorme impacto que tienen la TB y la COVID-19, es necesario reforzar la existencia y la coexistencia de las dos para tener en cuenta la organización del sistema de salud y el papel fundamental de la enfermería para gestionar adecuadamente a las personas afectadas y evitar la propagación de ambas enfermedades. Por lo tanto, se refuerza la importancia de aumentar la información individual de las personas que reciben tratamiento para la tuberculosis en los diversos servicios de la red de atención del SUS, adaptando las formas de contacto y vinculación de acuerdo con las posibilidades de los servicios y de las personas afectadas por la enfermedad.

DESCRIPTORES: Infecciones por Coronavirus; Enfermedades Transmisibles; Vigilancia en Salud Pública; Tuberculosis.

RESUMO

Esta reflexão objetivou discutir a interferência do enfrentamento à pandemia da COVID-19 na manutenção das ações de manejo e controle da tuberculose (TB) no Brasil, destacando o papel crucial da enfermagem nesse processo. A TB é considerada um importante problema de saúde pública no país, que registrou, em 2019, mais de 73 mil casos novos e cerca de 4500 óbitos decorrentes da doença em 2018. Nestes tempos incomuns em que a COVID-19 domina as práticas em saúde pelo enorme impacto que exercem, é necessário reforçar a existência e coexistência tanto da TB quanto a COVID-19, para que se leve em conta a organização do sistema de saúde e o papel fundamental da enfermagem, a fim de manejar adequadamente as pessoas acometidas e evitar a disseminação ainda maior de ambos os agravos. Reforça-se, então, a importância de levantar informações individuais das pessoas em tratamento da TB nos vários serviços da rede de atenção do SUS, adequar as formas de contato e vínculo de acordo com as possibilidades dos serviços e das pessoas acometidas pela doença.

DESCRIPTORES: Infecções por Coronavírus; Doenças Transmissíveis; Vigilância em Saúde Pública; Tuberculose.

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On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as a pandemic, registering, at the time, 118,319 cases and 4,292 deaths in different continents⁽¹⁾. In less than a month, the number of cases of infection by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, agent of COVID-19, reached 1,279,722 with 72,614 deaths directly related to the infection worldwide⁽²⁾.

Alarming and devastating, the “new coronavirus” has challenged scientists, health professionals, epidemiologists and government officials given the emergency and unknown situation that has left a legacy of deaths and a systematic impact worldwide in all sectors. In this context, in countries with high rates of imported diseases and local transmission, governments and communities have been mobilized to contain or delay the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on populations, health systems and national economies and global.

In addition to the seriousness of the situation, it is also necessary to consider the various infectious and chronic diseases, some secular, others endemic and seasonal, which accumulate routinely in the assistance spectrum of health services and systems, mainly in poor and developing countries, like Brazil, which

have a triple burden of disease, creating greater challenges in a public health emergency scenario.

It is noteworthy, for example, that in 2019 Brazil registered 73,684 new cases of tuberculosis (TB), which corresponds to an incidence coefficient of 35 cases/100 thousand inhabitants. When considering the total number of people with TB reported in the country, new cases and retreatments, there is an even greater number of 87,294 cases of the disease. Regarding deaths with direct mention of TB, the country had a total of 4,490 in 2018⁽³⁾.

Unlike COVID-19, TB is an infection known to affect humanity for thousands of years and has been declared a global emergency by WHO since 1993. According to WHO, an estimated 10 million people are affected by TB worldwide and more than 1.2 million people die each year and 3,014 a day from the disease⁽⁴⁾.

Although there are still no studies associating the worse clinical outcomes of COVID-19 with TB, it is important to consider that both *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and SARS-CoV-2 mainly attack the lungs, and affect the most vulnerable, biologically or socially⁽⁵⁾. It is also worth mentioning that both TB and COVID-19 have airborne transmission in common, safeguarding due

consideration between transmission by SARS-CoV-2 droplets and aerosols for TB, and some similar symptoms, such as coughing, drought, fever and shortness of breath.

Due to the enormous impact they have on public health, especially in this time of emergency and uncertainty, it is extremely important to prepare health systems to meet the coexistence of the two infections, among many others, so that it is possible to manage the affected people properly and avoid the even greater spread of both TB and COVID-19. For this, frontline health professionals need to be trained, equipped, protected, supported and qualified to receive and offer adequate and quality care with maximum safety to all involved.

Through the long existential path of TB, there is an established care and program history in Brazil for the control of the disease carried out through the health surveillance framework, which requires the existence and strengthening of the bond between professionals, health services, users, family and community for the development of prevention, diagnosis and monitoring of cases, and highlight the role played by the nursing team in the entire process, from tracking to closing cases.

However, the centralization of actions focused exclusively on the care

of COVID-19 cases in the current scenario constitutes another barrier to the early diagnosis of TB and, consequently, interruption of disease transmission, in addition to the difficulties in accessing medications, adversities in carrying out control and follow-up tests to continue the treatment of sensitive TB and drug-resistant TB.

Given the context that is set, it is worth emphasizing the importance of Nursing as a category, which is a pillar in the fight against both TB and COVID-19. Although there are similarities, as already mentioned, the issue of chronicity and aggravation, in one and the other, draws attention to the urgent need to plan health actions that must be effective in the coexistence of diseases that overload health services.

In addition to the "front line", a term popularized recently, it is up to Nursing, not only direct assistance, but also the organization, management, education of professionals and the community, as well as research. On several occasions, it is not possible to detach one activity from another, given the tangle of activities that are mainly up to the nurse professional.

No less evident, it is necessary to highlight the role played by nurses in instances that are strongly related to Health Surveillance at governmental levels, in the different spheres, highlighting the activities of reviewing regulations, elaboration of care protocols and notification of cases, among others, in order to slow down the rate of contamination and optimize resources in the Brazilian health system.

It is a fact that this crisis will not affect everyone in the same way, but in terms of diseases such as TB and COVID-19, it is known that the most vulnerable populations are the most affected.

It is a fact that this crisis will not affect everyone in the same way, but in terms of diseases such as TB and COVID-19, it is known that the most vulnerable populations are the most affected. It is necessary that health professionals do not lose their perspicacity in the identification of these groups, act in a creative and efficient way to deal with the obstacles that will be imposed, as well as, it is essential that managers can offer plausible conditions for these professionals to act safely.

In these unusual times when COVID-19 dominates health practices, it is necessary to reinforce the existence and coexistence of other infections and diseases so that the services and the health system are able to face what is emerging and what is once urgent. And this is the big challenge: making it possible for professionals who are on the "front line", including nurses, structural and organizational conditions that enable them to act in a qualified way, so that the outcome of the actions developed is satisfactory even in the face of the weaknesses that the Brazilian health system imposes us.

Finally, COVID-19 and TB, the recent and the remote, remind us of the importance of prioritizing health and research, valuing the nurse and his team, allocating financial and human resources to guarantee the constitutional right to the state of well-being, universal coverage, the functioning and strengthening of the Unified Health System (SUS) to meet the diverse needs of the Brazilian population. ■

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