

# Worker's health: The thinking of nursing in the face of the covid-19 pan-demic

**RESUMO** | Objetivo: Descrever a atuação e o pensar da Enfermagem no enfrentamento da pandemia da COVID-19 relacionado às condições de saúde e segurança no trabalho. Método: Trata-se de um estudo de artigo de revisão sistemática de literatura, realizado através de um levantamento de dados a partir da Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde durante os meses de abril a julho de 2020. Resultados: Foram selecionados 9 artigos que afirmaram o desafio da Enfermagem no âmbito educação em saúde, trabalho com limitações existente e a sua importância na linha de frente. Conclusão: Essa pandemia permite uma reflexão sobre trabalhadores de enfermagem, suas condições de trabalho, cuidado aos pacientes com vulnerabilidades e características diversas. Pensar nos seus anseios, medos, incertezas e condições seguras de trabalho pode favorecer a implantação da política de saúde e segurança do trabalhador, implantar medidas de prevenção e controle de contaminação ocupacional, estrutura hospitalar adequada, rede integrada institucional de apoio psicológico.

**Descritores:** Cuidados de enfermagem; Vulnerabilidade social; Saúde do trabalhador; COVID-19.

**ABSTRACT** | Objective: To describe the performance and thinking of Nursing in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic related to health and safety conditions at work. Method: This is a study of a systematic literature review article, carried out through a data survey from the Virtual Health Library during the months of April to July 2020. Results: 9 articles were selected that stated the challenge of Nursing in the field of health education, work with existing limitations and its importance on the front line. Conclusion: This pandemic allows a reflection on nursing workers, their working conditions, care for patients with different vulnerabilities and characteristics. Thinking about their anxieties, fears, uncertainties and safe working conditions can favor the implementation of the worker's health and safety policy, implement measures to prevent and control occupational contamination, adequate hospital structure, integrated institutional network of psychological support.

**Keywords:** Nursing care; social vulnerability; Worker's health; COVID-19.

**RESUMEN** | Objetivo: Describir la actuación y el pensamiento de Enfermería frente a la pandemia de COVID-19 en relación a las condiciones de salud y seguridad en el trabajo. Método: Se trata de un estudio de artículo de revisión sistemática de la literatura, realizado mediante levantamiento de datos de la Biblioteca Virtual en Salud durante los meses de abril a julio de 2020. Resultados: Se seleccionaron 9 artículos que planteaban el desafío de la Enfermería en el campo de la salud la educación, el trabajo con las limitaciones existentes y su importancia en la primera línea. Conclusión: Esta pandemia permite una reflexión sobre los trabajadores de enfermería, sus condiciones de trabajo, atención a pacientes con diferentes vulnerabilidades y características. Pensar en sus angustias, miedos, incertidumbres y condiciones de trabajo seguras puede favorecer la implementación de la política de seguridad y salud del trabajador, implementar medidas de prevención y control de la contaminación ocupacional, estructura hospitalaria adecuada, red institucional integrada de apoyo psicológico.

**Palabras claves:** Atención de enfermería; vulnerabilidad social; salud del trabajador; COVID-19.

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## INTRODUCTION

The current scenario is considered an unwanted and unexpected context, where we are faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, drastically affecting the world, with some countries more compromised. In the case of Brazil, a developing country with a population of approximately 211,552,132 inhabitants according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics<sup>1</sup>, with a large part of this population in conditions still considered precarious and vulnerable to several determinants of the health-disease process, they are highly exposed to infection by the coronavirus.

In today's society, even people with

education and educational training, well-structured financially and successful in several aspects, are being emotionally affected with the sudden change in their routine and future projections. Given this, how are the educationally and economically vulnerable people, without minimum living conditions, such as meeting basic human needs (BHN)? What thoughts arise? What life perspectives? What yearnings? Fears? Doubts? Distresses? What goes on in these people's minds? How are they treated in health facilities?

There are many questions that can arise and open space for us to reflect on this population, which policies are being adopted, if they are effective and if their needs are met.

Related to the NHBs, we understand that the imbalances on and around them generate needs that the human being seeks to satisfy them. They were ranked by Maslow: physiological needs; of security; of love/relationship; of esteem; and personal fulfillment. Their satisfaction is important for physical and mental health, requiring qualified care capable of remedying their deficits.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the clinical aspects to be observed, it is also necessary to think about the psychosocial aspects, for a humanized care focused on their real needs. Guiding the practice of care to prevent COVID-19 consists of dialoguing with patients about activities that the person can perform, but should be taught through health education carried out by professionals with the purpose of avoiding complications and harm reduction. But is the number of nursing workers enough to do all this? This factor can be the cause of excessive workload and physical and emotional exhaustion.

One of the non-pharmacological guidelines recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) is social distancing, that is, that people stay at home as a way to significantly reduce community transmission. However, this recommendation does not cover essential activities for society, such as those performed by health professionals. The presence of these workers in their work environments is necessary to guarantee essential care related to various health pro-

blems.<sup>3</sup>

However, health professionals, in order to provide humanized care to the most vulnerable people to the effects of the pandemic, also need to have their NHB attended, but these are compromised in this current context, in particular the Nursing category that represents most of these professionals.

The need for love/social is related to life in society, and includes the needs for conviviality, respect, friendship, leisure, social



Related to the pandemic, it is possible to identify that the thinking of nursing in the face of health and safety conditions at work, longs for health institutions to offer psychological support and continuing education on the provision of safe care, in order to avoid/minimize the risk of infection.



participation and affection of significant people.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to notice that Nursing renounced these NHBs due to the urgency of having to keep their work, aiming to guarantee the care and survival of people affected by the disease and, in many cases, had to keep away from their "family members/people with whom they lived" to protect them, and on the other hand, we can observe the donation of work and life to those in

need of care.

This context allowed us to reflect with transparency on key issues of professional practice in the field of health, often neglected by the State and which can be recognized as one of the vulnerable populations. In this scenario, questions emerge that may or may not be answered depending on the political forces that act in this environment. Do these professionals have their minimum working conditions? Is worker safety being met? Reflecting and knowing how these professionals think is important to analyze the current situation and their perception in relation to their protection and safety at work. It is necessary to collect data with qualified listening, analyze them and intervene with the objective of valuing the health of the worker.

Improvements are urgent in this lacking specialized infrastructure of municipalities and regions of Brazil. Many of our hospitals, emergency rooms, outpatient clinics and specialized services throughout the country, especially in the countryside, accumulate historical deficiencies in buildings, equipment, personnel and supplies.<sup>4</sup>

This is a worrying factor that makes us think about the deficiency that Brazil still has, even with the advances achieved and recognized by the Unified Health System (SUS), nursing needs to review its conceptions in relation to self-care and its process of producing a political subject. The pandemic is turning over the conceptions and initiatives of world and national leaders every day.

The community circulation of the coronavirus and the significant increase in care for severe respiratory problems showed how much the SUS is responsible for offering care, assumed on multiple fronts, in which they transit through surveillance and health promotion, but also in the appropriation and use of material and non-material technologies in management and at all levels of care, recognized internationally and, now, by the national media, which has always made such a strong criticism of the various problems of the health system.<sup>4</sup>

However, despite the advances and be-

nefits, many aspects of the SUS still need to be evaluated and implemented to increase the coverage and quality of services for professionals and users.

The above confirms the need for research related to the subject, mainly because Brazil is a developing country, with a large part of the population lacking the NHB. It is necessary to think about the current context and which changes deserve to be highlighted to ensure efficient assistance.

The objective of this study is to describe the performance of Nursing thinking in facing this pandemic related to health and safety conditions at work. Its relevance lies in the field of Nursing and also in other areas of health, which are interested in this theme and are dedicated to assistance with an emphasis on health promotion, in the prevention of diseases and injuries, but with assistance provided with protection and safety of the worker.

**METHOD**

This is a systematic literature review article study, carried out from April to July 2020, from the discipline Topics of Philosophy for Clinical Care in Nursing and Health, from the Master's Course of the Graduate Program in Clinical Care in Nursing and Health at the State University of Ceará.

As a methodological strategy used for research, it was done through a bibliographic survey, exploratory based on the reading, analysis and interpretation of scientific texts from Cadernos da Atenção Básica and Ordinances of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labor and Employment, in order to have a basis for what is being proposed on the subject.

Most of the electronic searches were performed from the VHL, from the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) databases, Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Science (LILACS), Nursing Database (BDENF) using the descriptors (DeCS): Nursing care, Social vulnerability, Occupational health, COVID-19, using the Boolean operator OR and AND, the articles that provided the full

text in full, in Portuguese and English were adopted as inclusion criteria, and as exclusion criteria, those that did not contain complete texts in full and did not address the topic in question. After reading the articles, the following question arose for a reflection: What is Nursing's thinking about health and safety at work in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RESULTS**

After searching the MEDLINE, LILACS, BDENF databases, only 4 articles were selected from the total of 22, as it was at the beginning of the pandemic and there were not many articles published on the subject. Inclusion criteria were those that provided the full text in full, in Portuguese and English, and as exclusion criteria, those that did not contain full texts in full and did not address the topic in question.

In addition to the four articles used, selected using the Boolean operator OR and AND and the DeCS: Nursing care, Social vulnerability, Occupational health, COVID-19, nine more related to the theme were selected, without the use of the Boolean operator to support the guiding question.

The 4 selected journals presented the synthesis of the studies included in the article from the LILACS, MEDLINE and BDENF databases, from April to July 2020, distributed with the titles and their respective objectives.

They were relevant and of fundamental importance for the basis of the study, focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic. They addressed topics necessary to support the policies to face the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, aiming to support the decision-making of public agents involved in the control of the pandemic.

Still on the subject of journals, it was

**Tabela 01. Síntese dos Estudos selecionados a partir das bases LILACS, MEDLINE e BDENF, no período abril a julho 2020.**

Reference	Title	Study Objective	Year
2	What is urgent and necessary to support policies to face the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil? <small>(O que é urgente e necessário para subsidiar as políticas de enfrentamento da pandemia de COVID-19 no Brasil?)</small>	Support the decision-making of public agents involved in controlling the epidemic and society in general.	2020
8	Neoliberalism knockout? Will it be possible to strengthen the historical principles of SUS and PHC in the midst of the pandemic? <small>(Nocaute do neoliberalismo? Será possível fortalecer os princípios históricos do SUS e da APS em meio à pandemia?)</small>	Show that the coronavirus has become a historic opportunity to rescue the centrality of SUS in social policy and PHC in the Brazilian health system.	2020
10	Prevention related to occupational exposure of health professionals in the COVID-19 scenario. <small>(Prevenção relacionada à exposição ocupacional do profissional de saúde no cenário de COVID-19.)</small>	Describe the main recommendations on contagion prevention actions related to the occupational exposure of health professionals working in the face of COVID-19	2020
15	Management of the Coronavirus pandemic in a hospital: professional experience report. <small>(Gestão da pandemia Coronavirus em um hospital: relato de experiência profissional.)</small>	To describe the management experience for the care of a patient confirmed or suspected of having Coronavirus in a hospital in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre	2020

Source: Prepared by the author, 2022.

possible to analyze the strengthening of the historical principles of SUS and PHC in the midst of the pandemic, where the coronavirus became a historic opportunity to rescue the centrality of SUS in social policy and PHC in the Brazilian health system .

It was possible to perceive the importance of prevention related to occupational exposure of health professionals in this scenario and to know the main recommendations on contagion prevention actions related to occupational exposure of health professionals working in the face of the pandemic.

Based on these studies, an analysis and reflection were carried out on the situation of health professionals working during the COVID-19 pandemic period, and to bring a reflection on the current scenario.

## DISCUSSION

With an analysis of the readings and in order to answer the guiding question of the study, a discussion was held with a subtitle "Contemporary challenges with worker health and safety in the context of the pandemic" which encompasses and represents the subject under analysis and reflection of the selected journals and the manuals of the Ministry of Health to support the subject in question.

### Contemporary challenges with worker health and safety in the context of the pandemic

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) characterized the global outbreak of the disease caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 as a pandemic state, known as COVID-19, which led health services to a new scenario of health and safety actions aimed at the various professionals involved in caring for the population. <sup>5</sup>

Insufficient scientific knowledge about the new coronavirus, its high speed of dissemination and ability to cause deaths in vulnerable populations generate uncertainties regarding the choice of the best strategies to be used to face the pandemic in different parts of the world. In Brazil, the challenges

that presented themselves were even greater, because little was known about the transmission characteristics of COVID-19 in a context of great social and demographic inequalities, with populations living in precarious conditions of housing and sanitation, without constant access to water, in crowded conditions and with a high prevalence of chronic diseases. <sup>3</sup>

Nursing is on the front line in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide the necessary care, professionals need to feel safe, to act more effectively, as there are many needy people and numerous questions and concerns are involved in this scenario.

The popular classes, formal and informal workers, the unemployed, discouraged and miserable will find it very difficult or impossible to keep the recommendations and impositions. In slums and poor communities, dispersed in small, medium and large municipalities throughout the Brazilian territory, there is a lack of more than products and personal hygiene rules, there is no water, home, work and money to face each day. As a result, the effects of the epidemic will be much more severe for these Brazilians, compared to their more affluent fellow countrymen. In the public sphere, we know well that our strength is the construction of the SUS, a universal, free, comprehensive and quality health system, based on Primary Health Care (PHC). <sup>4</sup>

This pandemic is a historic opportunity to rescue the importance of SUS in various public spheres, but the State needs to reaffirm pacts with society, restructure and make possible a considerable advance in the scope of its principles.

The achievements of SUS are numerous. In 30 years, a great tangle of health services has been created, from PHC to so-called 4th generation hospitals, including specialized outpatient services, cancer centers, the supply of transplants, intersectoral actions to promote health and to face the most distal determinants of illness and to promote the determinants of better quality of life. However, in relation to the failures of the SUS we have two main groups, the first is access,

even though the service network has expanded, reaching 43,275 Family Health teams, 6,000 general and specialized hospitals and about 300,000 hospital beds in December/2019, one of the greatest features of the SUS is the restriction of access. The second group of failures is insufficient quality in the management of risk factors and chronic conditions, including mental health. <sup>6</sup>

However, regardless of the population to be served, the sector and the level of care provided, it is necessary to guarantee the safety and health of the professional, with availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and access to COVID-19 care services, as everyone is subject to becoming infected, and if this happens and it is serious, where will this professional be sent? Will you have access to assistance services? These are reflections that may arise in the face of the capacity of beds in health institutions.

Examples of the most frequent risks in work environments and their effects on health, state that workers are exposed to several categories of risks, such as: physical, chemical, mechanical, biological, psychosocial. <sup>7</sup> Based on this approach, it is possible to perceive that one of the effective measures to avoid infection by coronavirus is the proper use of PPE. Corroborating the above, Regulatory Norm-32 (NR-32) stands out, which aims to establish basic guidelines for the implementation of measures to protect the safety and health of health service workers, as well as those who carry out health promotion and assistance activities in general, describes the risks of exposure and measures adopted to prevent them. <sup>8</sup>

The adaptation of care professionals in the face of drastic changes in their work environment can be seen as one of the main challenges presented in the face of this pandemic. Actions such as patient care, workload, attire, correct use of PPE and increased care complexity have been shown to be major concerns. Fear and apprehension among professionals are constant and refer mainly to the risk of exposing themselves to the virus and the concern of contagion of their families. Allied to this, we have the insecurity experienced by the constant changes in



care flows and institutional protocols, which makes the work routine difficult. We are fighting a battle against an invisible agent that threatens us and holds us hostage. This situation brought about by the coronavirus causes a lot of psychological pressure, which ends up causing or aggravating mental problems for professionals who are on the front line.<sup>9</sup>

However, even in the face of this context of insecurities, risks and fears, it is necessary to adopt care aimed at those who need to be assisted, including nursing workers. Due to the peculiarity of this type of care, the work of Nursing professionals stands out, offering continuous care, considering the person in the bio-psycho-social-spiritual dimensions, not limited to technical procedures.<sup>10</sup>

Each team member is an individual and subjective being, in which he is included in the particularities and interpersonal relationships, which introduces his history, his feelings and his personal problems. All their psychological baggage, their knowledge, prejudices and experiences come with them in the organization and, thus, their role will be represented within the work group. Inter-professional work is an essential instrument related to health care.<sup>11</sup>

Humanized care is understood as an opportunity to bring back human qualities such as empathy, which means having a look at the other's world, such as feelings and opinions. The team's commitment to the patient is one of the necessary conditions for humanization. Humanizing concerns the search for respect, acceptance of the individual in his multiplicity, by involving his feelings, his pain, difficulties, all the baggage of knowledge and his own values. Professionals who are satisfied with caring for others seek learning and knowledge, to equip themselves for care, with a view to quality.<sup>10</sup>

In order to be willing to take this kind of care and allow yourself to learn from everything, it is necessary to be open to a deep reflection on the various questions that this scenario presents us with. This pandemic allows us to think meditatively in the face of so many uncertainties. It is possible to find solutions to problems when we are willing

to think, and for that it is necessary to understand what needs to change, and, related to the pandemic, can be detected with the experiences that the workers of the nursing team already bring, and consequently there will be possibilities of finding the new to fill the existing gaps.

It is necessary to understand the being, and for that it is necessary to listen to it. Heidegger proposes in his work an existential analysis through its fundamental ontology. For him, being is a more universal concept, since it is constantly present in our daily dealings with the world,

but it is simultaneously the most obscure, requiring, therefore, discussion and reflection, since the understanding of being given by metaphysics throughout history has been sedimented. The obscuration of the question of being was constituted by the way in which the question was posed by traditional ontology: when asking what being is, we make use of a prior understanding of being in the interrogation itself. When reflecting on this way of questioning, Heidegger points out how previous interpretations about being are impregnated in the question and proposes another way to question: questioning being in its sense, which is essential to the understanding of things in our daily life.<sup>12</sup>

Information is a key piece for the technique to safeguard itself, where language itself is information as it is transformed into a means of exchanging messages, assuming the functions of communicating, transmitting and instituting, impacting on the possibility that all objects and existences are put to Dasein, as if it could safeguard its dominion over the entirety of the Earth and even what would be beyond.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars refer that for Heidegger, we always think about technique and leave aside the question of its essence, which would make a total difference between our understanding and relationship with it. Because we do not think about this issue, we maintain this type of relationship lacking freedom with it, because only a reflection on the subject could make us relate to its essence, since this reflection is precisely what would

open us to new ways of understanding it.<sup>14</sup>

If man is turned to things different from himself and meaning is discovered in the world, then the human being must be open to the world and, in that openness, go beyond himself, finding what is different to him. The human being is an entity that defines and redefines itself according to the possibilities in which it projects itself, from the occupations and concerns that it finds in the world. In this way, in your being there is indeterminacy and freedom.<sup>15</sup>

The knowledge of being is a condition for the possibility of knowledge of any and all beings, of any and all objects as such. The entity is also in the sense that it is what is most certain. Because it gives itself in the self-evidence of immediacy and in an original way, because it offers itself without mediations, deviations, approximations, gradations, the entity leaves no room for doubt. It can certainly be taken as a "concrete universal". The being emerges in every being, gathering in its unity each and every one of the beings. It is the common and undifferentiated identity that does not exclude, but rather promotes and includes all differences in its concretions.<sup>16</sup>

Through these philosophical thoughts, it can be outlined that it is necessary to have evidence of the facts for the transformation of thought, to direct attitudes that promote the potential for solving the problems revealed, for a possible reassessment of the reorganization of health services, dignified and safe working conditions, aiming at the well-being of professionals and those in need of care.

Thinking about the work of Nursing from the context of a pandemic was a challenge that could be moderated by philosophy. The philosophical readings elucidate many social phenomena, the reflections and mental incitements provoked could explain how Nursing professionals face their confrontations and manage, with professional dexterity and affective and effective interactions, to contribute to minimize the effects of the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

Nursing must provide humanized care to patients, motivating them towards autonomy and self-care, contributing to the improvement of quality of life. However, to better provide this care, it needs conditions that favor health and safety at work.

Related to the pandemic, it is possible to identify that the thinking of nursing in the face of health and safety conditions at work, longs for health institutions to offer psychological support and continuing education on the provision of safe care, in order to avoid/minimize the risk of infection.

In view of the reports of experiences mentioned in the articles, nursing is going through a tense process related to several

aspects with the unexpected scenario of the pandemic, and to minimize it, for the safety of the development of their activities, it's recommended the training of health workers, adjustments in the structure of operational flows of services, access to PPE in sufficient and effective quantity, alert for mental health, to avoid compromising it, due to fear, insecurity and apprehension with the advancement of the disease.

In this way, it is hoped that the results of this study can support reflections on adequate care for nursing professionals in the fight against the pandemic, covering the field of health education, by favoring adequate training given the scenario, as well as providing adequate outcomes for the existing struggles

in the category. It is recommended to listen to these professionals who are working in this scenario, discuss and debate their thoughts, arguments, experiences, to serve as a basis for new care strategies aimed at their real health needs.

When reflecting on the contribution of Nursing in the face of COVID-19, there is a strong prospect for the post-pandemic scenario. This situation calls for urgent reformulation of the care process within the territory. It is necessary to mobilize, this call is decisive, one cannot fail to make the previously obscured tensions visible, one must act to fill the existing gaps. 🐦

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