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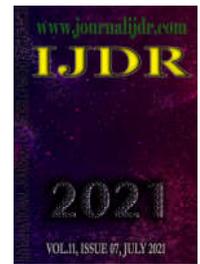
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## THE NURSING PROFESSIONAL AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE INCREASE STRATEGIES IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC BY COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of the role of Nursing team members in the entire pandemic context we live in is observed. Therefore, this comprehensive responsibility has generated an alert about the mental health and quality of life that these professionals are experiencing. **Objectives:** Discuss scientific evidences that point to the quality of life of nursing professionals in times of pandemic and propose measures that cooperate for its promotion. **Method:** This is an article reflecting on the effects of the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus on the quality of life of nursing professionals. **Results and Discussion:** The factors that influence the psychosocial impact are related to what surrounds the pandemic and the degree of vulnerability in which the person is at that given moment. Some protective self-care measures can offer possibilities for each person to find relief from emotional discomfort or even serve as suggestions in the professionals' care planning for people seeking help. **Conclusion:** The pandemic has generated a series of strains in all spheres of society. Today, the need for restructuring and monitoring of the Nursing work process is identified as fundamental.

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## INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus is a family of viruses responsible for respiratory infections that are the second leading cause of common cold (after rhinovirus). Seven known human coronaviruses (HCoV) are described, including SARS-COV (which causes severe acute respiratory syndrome), MERS-COV (Middle East respiratory syndrome) and SARS-CoV-2 (virus which causes coronavirus disease 2019 - COVID-19). The new coronavirus agent was discovered on December 31, 2019, after reported cases in Wuhan, China (Brazil, 2020; WHO<sup>a</sup>, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on January 30, 2020, that the outbreak of the disease caused by it constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Importance – the Organization's highest level of alert, as provided for in the International Health Regulations. On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was characterized by the WHO as a pandemic. The ease of propagation, the lack of knowledge about the virus and the exponential increase in the number of infections contributed to this (WHO<sup>b</sup>, 2020). In order to reduce the impacts of the pandemic, reducing the peak of incidence and the number of deaths, some

countries have adopted measures such as isolating suspected cases, closing schools and universities, social distancing from the elderly and other risk groups, as well as quarantine the entire population. It was estimated that these measures would reach the "flattening of the curve" of infection, by favoring a lower incidence peak in a given period, reducing the chances that the capacity of hospital beds, respirators and other supplies would be insufficient in view of the increase demand, which could lead to higher mortality. More than a year after these initial measures, we still live with new peaks in cases and a considerable increase in the number of deaths. On March 16, 2020, in compliance with Decree No. 46,973 (Rio de Janeiro, 2020), the public health emergency situation in the State of Rio de Janeiro due to contagion is recognized and measures to combat the spread resulting from the new coronavirus (COVID-19) are adopted. Among the interventions to contain the impacts of the pandemic, acceleration in the development of vaccines, therapeutic interventions and diagnostic tests were proposed (Domingues *et al.*, 2020). In Brazil, the Ministry of Health presented as a measure to combat the disease the so-called National Plan for the Operationalization of Vaccination against COVID-19, defined as Public Health Emergency of

International Importance (Brazil, 2021). This Plan has been operated by the National Immunization Program (PNI), which was created in 1973 and is responsible for the national immunization policy and has become one of the most important public health interventions (Pedreira et al., 2021). As for the production of vaccines, the National Technical Report on the vaccination campaign against COVID-19, presented the WHO panorama indicating the existence of 173 candidate vaccines in the pre-clinical research phase and 63 candidate vaccines in the clinical research phase. In all, 20 have reached Phase III clinical trials. Two of which were selected as suitable for introduction into the public health network of the PNI, these being the CoronaVac vaccines from Sinovac/Butantan Pharmaceuticals and the AstraZeneca produced by the University of Oxford in partnership with the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) and the Institute Serum from India, constituted respectively by the inactivated virus SARS-CoV-2 and the recombinant adenovirus (Brazil, 2021). However, due to the limited availability of vaccine doses, the MS considered it necessary to prioritize groups for vaccination, and among these groups, there are populations at higher risk, such as the elderly (60 or more), health professionals, people with morbidities and among others. Given this reality, nursing plays an important role with regard to immunizations, monitoring all technical and operational settings in the vaccine room and vaccine campaigns, and the result of this service is focused on the safety and efficacy procedures of immunobiologicals, as well such as compliance with specific recommendations for conservation, handling, administration and post-vaccination follow-up (Pedreira et al., 2021). The importance of the role of the Nursing team in the entire pandemic context in which we live is observed. Therefore, this comprehensive responsibility has generated an alert about the mental health and quality of life that these professionals are experiencing. Health professionals, and especially nursing professionals, face additional challenges during outbreaks of infectious diseases, including service overload, shortage of human and material resources, uncertainty about the effectiveness of treatments used, and concerns about managing their own health, and that of their families and patients (Souza & Souza, 2020). Based on what was presented and to meet the study proposal, the following objectives were outlined: Discuss the scientific evidence that points to the quality of life of nursing professionals in times of pandemic and propose measures that cooperate for its promotion.

## METHOD

This article reflects on the effects of the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus on the quality of life of nursing professionals. For this reflection, we opted for a study based on secondary sources of literature relevant to the subject, considering articles from national and international journals available in the scientific databases SciELO, Medline and Lilacs. Thus, it will make it possible to discuss the development or the 'state of the art' of the subject on screen, from a theoretical and conceptual point of view. Discussing issues that guide the preservation of quality of life will be of great importance so that mental illness does not occur and does not generate greater impacts on nursing professionals than Covid-19 itself.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Impacts of Covid-19 on the mental health of nursing professionals:*

In the presence of pandemics, people's physical health and combating the pathogen are the primary focuses of attention for managers and health professionals, so the implications for mental health tend to be neglected or underestimated. Therefore, discussing issues that guide the preservation of this mental component can be of great importance, so that mental illness does not generate greater impacts than Covid-19 itself on the physical component. When there is not complete attention to the individual, considerable damage is seen in different segments of society (Ornell et al., 2020). During a pandemic, a large part of the population is expected to be in a constant state of alert, worried, confused, stressed and feeling out of control in the face of the uncertainties of the moment. Thus, it can be foreseeable that a

part of the same exposed population may suffer some psychopathological manifestation, if no specific care intervention is made for the manifested reactions and symptoms. The factors that influence the psychosocial impact are related to what the pandemic is about and the degree of vulnerability in which the person is at that given moment. However, it is important to highlight that not all psychological and social problems presented can be qualified as diseases. Most will be classified as normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Among health professionals, manifestations of fear of contaminating their family members and insecurity about adequate protection with personal protective equipment (PPE) made available for use are common. There is also the fear of getting sick, which can reveal fear of death, of leaving the team overloaded or even guilt for surviving in the face of so many deaths. They are emotionally impacted by watching the loss of patients they were unable to save in a short time (Lai et al., 2020). A study with health teams after an Ebola outbreak found symptoms of weariness, social isolation and post-traumatic stress disorder (Paladino et al., 2017). Epidemics and outbreaks of disease contamination are usually followed by large individual and social psychosocial impacts (Duan & Zhu, 2020).

During the 2003 SARS-CoV outbreak in Singapore City, 27% of healthcare professionals reported psychiatric symptoms. The nursing staff who provided services related to MERS showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder after the 2015 Korean outbreak, especially related to the feeling of interpersonal isolation and fear of contagion and transmission among family members. Similarly, during the Ebola outbreaks in Sierra Leone in 2014 and in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018, nursing staff and other health teams, who worked in direct contact with infected patients, reported high levels of anxiety and stigma (Goulia et al., 2010). As an aggravating aspect for the identification of mental health problems, nurses and doctors also reported that they had difficulty in noticing possible psychological problems in their co-workers, especially due to the difficulty of interaction and communication between team members, attributed to the continuous use of clothes individual protection and the required distance itself (Torales et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, nursing professionals have also been showing high levels of psychological distress, namely: In Canada, 47% of these professionals reported the need for psychological support; In the People's Republic of China, professionals reported high rates of depression (50%), anxiety (45%) and insomnia (34%); and, finally, in Pakistan, a large number of these professionals reported moderate (42%) to severe (26%) psychological distress (NU, 2020). For these reasons, there are online mental health care initiatives, led by specialist nurses and psychologists, some mediated by class councils or institutions that reach out to their professionals. These initiatives already experienced in other countries, which are currently in another stage of the pandemic, have shown good results related to reception and possible interventions for this public (Brooks et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). The reports of nursing professionals assisted include: \* anxiety, due to the lack of PPE, pressure from the immediate superior, news from the media about the disease, the number of deaths in the shifts; \* fear of becoming infected and the risk of transmitting the virus to family members; \* ambivalence, because, on the one hand, people value their work and, on the other, they discriminate against them, not wanting contact with them; \* sadness and depressive complaints, associated with loneliness, distance from families, death of professionals in the work team, living and following the fragility of the hospital system; and exhaustion or emotional exhaustion, resulting from the increased workload during this pandemic period (Brooks et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2020). In the long term, these circumstances increase the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), depression, other anxiety disorders, substance misuse and suicide (Li et al., 2020).

### *Strategies to increase the quality of life for nursing professionals:*

Some protective self-care measures can offer possibilities for everyone to find relief from emotional discomfort or even serve as suggestions in the professionals' care planning for people seeking help. In this sense, self-care practices in mental health can benefit people, when undertaken and systematically incorporated into daily

life, as they are configured as health promotion measures. Moments of crisis can be times of rescue and constitute opportunities for learning and personal growth. It is necessary to consider that, even with the psychosocial misfortunes resulting from the pandemic, it is possible to reach moments of well-being (Esperidião *et al.*, 2020). In a study carried out in Ireland with 604 people of both sexes, after the closing of schools and non-essential services, during the period of social distancing, it showed that outdoor activities such as exercising, land-related activities, engaging in hobbies, contributed to reduce people's negative emotions, suggesting the protective role related to well-being during this moment of pandemic (Lades *et al.*, 2020). It is necessary to rescue simple attitudes for the good life, seeking self-support mechanisms in counterpoint to the concerns and fears experienced. Recognizing and embracing one's own limitations, even though it may bring discomfort, is without a doubt a good and absolutely healthy start. It is recommended to evaluate new and/or known successful strategies from the existential repertoire in difficult situations with a view to implementing them. The movement of introspection, aimed at self-knowledge should be encouraged, to rediscover what is or can be pleasurable in daily life, despite changes in routine due to the moment of psychosocial restrictions (Esperidião *et al.*, 2020). It is noticed that Brazilians have a lot of faith in God and religiosity, which feeds their spirituality. It may be that this form of conduct is beneficial, as it is already seen that science has shown the power of prayer to increase the production of endorphins in the body of those who pray. Endorphin has a powerful analgesic action and, when released, promotes a feeling of well-being, comfort, better mood and happiness, consequently helping to relax (Santos *et al.*, 2020).

Studies and scientific production can collaborate to improve the quality of life. The distance generated by the pandemic can be used to write, to produce texts that were inconclusive or to initiate other texts that they would like to do. The history of humanity highlights the need that man has always had to express himself in different ways, in addition to the verbal as a way of recording events and feelings, evidencing the strong bond that has always existed between humanity and its prints. Through writing, the importance of expressing feelings is highlighted and how fruitful the investigation of their meanings can be. The writing activity works to fill a void, helping the individual to let go of anxieties, release feelings, or as a journey of self-reflection and self-knowledge (Oliveira *et al.*, 2019). An activity described in the literature is the practice of Mindfulness, for example, which encourages us to turn mindfulness to the present moment and self-compassion with challenging experiences, seeking to perceive thoughts, bodily sensations and emotions in the moment they occur, accepting them without reacting in a way habitual. All over the world, there are studies that prove the countless benefits for physical and mental health (Behan, 2020). Likewise, integrative and complementary practices in health, recognized in their actions with the Brazilian Unified Health System, have contributed to the promotion of health, quality of life and balance between mind, body and spirit. There are groups of specialists who have published booklets with suggestions and guidance on various self-care practices, which are especially useful to face the psychic effects of the pandemic (Nelson, 2020). Initiatives aimed at relieving tension in moments of emotional maladjustment are highly indicated and resolute for the balance and care of psychological distress, positively influencing mental health. Promoting moments of pause throughout the day, to realize, breathing slowly and deeply, bringing good energy to the body and eliminating unpleasant sensations are equally healthy and desirable measures in daily life (Esperidião *et al.*, 2020).

Listing what you like to do can be an appropriate exercise to give visibility to the needs that are being met, in order, in a next step, to redirect some self-care actions, if applicable. This exercise also favors the identification of what is not pleasant and, as far as possible, it can be replaced by initiatives that offer more pleasant sensations. Finding new pleasures, rescuing some forgotten ones: proximity to music, movies, pleasure in cooking, organizing the house, taking care of plants, animals, the car, learning or developing languages, visiting websites, museums and entertainment services and online courses

(Esperidião *et al.*, 2020). Currently, with the internet, there are several options available and accessible without the need for much technological apparatus. Likewise, it is desirable to incorporate meditative practices, nature contemplation, breathing exercises, relaxation that help in physical and mental balance, in addition to approaching religiosity, favoring comfort and benefits in reducing stress, insomnia and inner peace. Follow the routine as close as possible to the usual one, trying to maintain the habits: time for work, study, exercise, sleep, housework, shopping routine, monitoring the children's school activities. Even in the home office, keeping tidy promotes well-being and self-esteem. Taste more of the tasks, lightly undertake the assignments and commitments at work and family. Make room for healthy eating, hydration, sun exposure (Esperidião *et al.*, 2020). One measure that should be encouraged within Nursing professionals who already experience stressful situations in their professional routine is to establish the practice of filtering the absorbed information. It is important to read safe sources, and within limits that are good for you. Value the absorption of information that portray stories with positive outcomes and record images of people who have overcome the disease. Such measures are means of propagating hope and minimizing feelings of fear and insecurity. Finally, understand the time to seek professional help in the face of weaknesses you may have and that at the moment when things are getting out of control, look for self-help tools or immediate professional support, either through specialized professionals in person and/or through services provided by means of remote tools to meet needs related to emotional stabilization.

## CONCLUSION

The reflection process provides much more than answers to doubts. He points out concerns, capable of generating other reflections, explaining the non-exhaustion of possibilities to respond to a demand. From this perspective, it is observed that times of crisis are capable of promoting significant changes in the way people think and act, arousing interests and mobilizing different forces in solving the problems that arise. The pandemic generated a series of strains in all spheres of society. Today, the need for restructuring and monitoring of the Nursing work process is identified as fundamental. The organization of work is a fundamental requirement for the maintenance and development of quality of life in work environments, as well as the development of programs that encourage and motivate workers in general. Therefore, when studying nursing work in a pandemic context, the participation of team members should be enabled, so that, in an integrated way, they can point out the paths for solving the difficulties related to the development of their activities in the difficult times we are living in.

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