



ISSN: 2230-9926

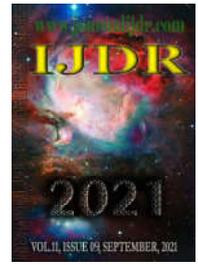
Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

# IJDR

International Journal of Development Research

Vol. 11, Issue, 09, pp. 50198-50201, September, 2021

<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.22881.09.2021>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

## THE SAFETY OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR CLIENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF A COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A REFLECTIVE STUDY

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2021  
Received in revised form 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2021  
Accepted 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 2021  
Published online 27<sup>th</sup> September, 2021

#### Key Words:

Patient safety; Nursing; COVID-19; Pandemic.

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### ABSTRACT

Pain COVID-19 has become an important challenge for global health due to its potential capacity for rapid spread throughout the world. Despite the impacts arising from the ongoing pandemic, there is an opportunity to promote reflection on the aspects that guide health actions within the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS), in order to assess and understand their needs. Despite all its importance for the administration of health in hospitals, nursing does not always enjoy the recognition to which it is entitled. In many cases, especially in Brazil, the disrespect for these professionals is such that even the most basic rights to the quality of service and the safety of nurses are denied. **Objectives:** to reflect on the importance of the perspective of quality in nursing care and to point out the essential strategies to promote safe care in hospital units. **Method:** This article on the safety of nursing professionals and their patients in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Results and Discussion:** The immense gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a serious warning about how society fails to protect those who dedicate their lives to protect the health of the population. It was possible to see that it is necessary to expand the culture of quality in nursing services and train nurses to analyze the results, developing a reflection on nursing care and its processes, seeking continuous improvement in care. **Conclusion:** The importance of these debates on safety is highlighted in these times of pandemic, where so many health professionals lose their lives due to contagions that occurred during their medical practice.

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**Citation:** Bruno da Silva Lourenço, Mayckow Carvalho da Silva Oliveira, Flavia Nunes Dornelas Tresse, Elizeu Adriano Rocha da Silva, Leonardo Vinicius de Araújo Santos, Luciana Quagliane Ribeiro, Leonardo Lima de Moraes dos Reis, Janaina Rosa Lourenço da Silva and Luana Valentim Monteiro. 2021. "The safety of nursing professionals and their clients in the context of a covid-19 pandemic: a reflective study", *International Journal of Development Research*, 11, (09), 50198-50201.

## INTRODUCTION

Since its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century, nursing has been marked by its excellence in composing the front line in treating the sick and fighting all sorts of diseases. The activities performed by nurses and nurses are numerous and are listed in various situations, such as: Collection of tests of the most diverse, administration of medications, various private procedures, among others. It is a profession of enormous importance for the health of society, since without it medicine does not materialize in its magnitude. Even so, what is observed in society is a certain dismay towards the nursing

professional who rarely receives all the prestige, respect and protection that should be granted to them, especially during one of the most serious health crises in recent history: the pandemic of COVID-19. It turns out that, in many cases, these health professionals are left to their own devices. Few institutions really offer the necessary resources for your security. Even fewer procedures are elaborated, transmitted and adopted in order to guarantee their safety against the biological risks to which they are exposed in their profession. About COVID-19, it is described that it was first detected in the city of Wuhan, capital of the province of Central China, in December 2019. Its name comes from the respiratory syndrome caused by the new coronavirus. 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 (WHO, 2020). According to the National Health Surveillance Agency (2020), according to currently available information, the way of transmission from one person to another of SARS-CoV-2 occurs through respiratory droplets (expelled during speech, coughing or sneezing) and also by direct contact with infected persons or indirect contact through contaminated hands, objects or surfaces, similarly to other respiratory pathogens spread. In addition, virus transmission occurs through aerosols (particles smaller and lighter than droplets) generated during direct manipulation of the airway such as in orotracheal intubation or other potentially aerosol-generating procedures. COVID-19 has become a major global health challenge due to its potential ability to spread rapidly around the world. Despite the impacts arising from the ongoing pandemic, there is an opportunity to promote reflection on the aspects that guide health actions within the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS), in order to assess and understand their needs and thus intervene regarding the improvement of such a system, to achieve significant improvements in the quality of care provided (Chaves & Bellei, 2020). The Joint Commission International (JCI), in partnership with the WHO, established six international patient safety goals, with the objective of promoting specific improvements in care situations considered to be of greater risk. Within the scope of COVID-19, goal number 5 stands out: to reduce the risk of infections associated with health care through the effective program for hand hygiene (HM) in five moments during the provision of care (before contact with a patient, before performing aseptic procedures, after risk of exposure to bodily fluids, after contact with a patient and after contact with areas close to the patient) as an important measure to reduce the transmission of microorganisms by means of the hands in the units hospitals (Misawa, 2016). Thus, the objective of this study is to reflect on the importance of the perspective of quality in nursing care and to point out the essential strategies to promote safe care in hospital units.

## METHODS

This article reflects on the safety of nursing professionals and their patients in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 safety of nursing professionals and their process of action against the new coronavirus will be of great importance, so that their performance is safe and effective and does not generate major impacts on their health and the patient under their responsibility.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**The Systematization of Nursing Care and Safe Practice:** Despite all its importance for the administration of health in hospitals, nursing does not always enjoy the recognition to which it is entitled. In many cases, especially in Brazil, the disrespect for these professionals is such that even the most basic rights to the quality of service and the safety of nurses are denied. In many cases, being forced to deal with precariousness of resources and lack of safety and hygiene conditions necessary for its own preservation. Chamboredon, Roman and Colson, in a study carried out in France, were emphatic in highlighting the importance of nursing professionals during the pandemic in question, mentioning the need for greater recognition of these professionals. Regarding the lack of protection, it is highlighted that with the new coronavirus pandemic, nurses are the first to contact patients in emergency rooms. With this, nursing professionals around the world, especially in Brazil, were quickly infected by the disease,

being the most constant victims of this global disease. In this sense, the Nursing category stands out negatively in studies that show that there are more than 2.2 million professionals working in the most diverse levels of care in the health area throughout Brazil. With long working hours and lack of inputs to practice the profession safely, manifestations in social networks have been common, especially of nurses, nursing technicians and assistants, health managers and the population, concerned with the health and physical integrity of those who is in direct contact with the pandemic. The big issue is that professionals deal with the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and guidance in using them (Ferreira, 2020). It is easy to see that many of these deaths in nursing would have been avoided if an adequate safety system had been adopted to guarantee the protection of the health professional. To get an idea of the level of infection and mortality among healthcare professionals, nearly 1,600 healthcare professionals died from Covid-19 complications as of May this year, according to data from the Federal Council of Medicine (CFM) and the Federal Council of Nursing (COFEN). According to the latest Epidemiological Bulletin of the Ministry of Health (until June 12), in 2021, 112,997 health professionals were diagnosed by Covid-19. The most affected professions were nursing technicians and assistants (29.5%), followed by nurses (16.9%), physicians (10.6%) and community health agents (5.3%) (Lopes, 2021).

The immense gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a serious warning about how much society fails to protect those who dedicate their lives to protecting the health of the population. It was possible to see that it is necessary to expand the culture of quality in nursing services and train nurses to analyze the results, developing a reflection on nursing care and its processes, seeking continuous improvement of care (Silva et al, 2010). Encouraging the improvement of the quality of nursing care safety results in enhancing not only the service to the public, but also the functionality of the health team that works in the hospital. Work safety is a fundamental issue in any profession, however the issue becomes even more serious when working with biohazards. Access to information in this case becomes essential. For Sanches (2016), there is low knowledge of health professionals about adverse events and how to notify them, fear of health professionals to expose errors due to the institutions' punishment policy and low adherence to the hand hygiene technique. In addition to the lack of information, nursing professionals also need to deal with the rigidity of hospital hierarchies, which often prevents professionals from having the freedom to report errors. It is necessary to think about the reality of the risks of nursing practice, since the continuous improvement of the quality of nursing care must be considered a dynamic process of identifying the intervening factors in the work process of the nursing team, requiring this professional to implementation of actions and the development of instruments that make it possible to systematically assess the levels of quality of care provided (Silva et al, 2010).

As a strategy to improve the safety of nursing practice, the development of the Nursing Care Systematization (SAE) is proposed, which works as a set of methods created to maintain the care provided by health professionals, avoiding accidents both with them and with patients. For Pereira et al. (2017), the SAE was identified as a way to support the nurse, considering it the patient's safety. It is also noteworthy that SAE and patient safety always "go together" and cannot be separated in the actions undertaken in nursing care. Nursing actions can be scientifically planned through the SAE in order to promote greater visibility and protection of their practices; being its fundamental use for the reduction of accidents. It allows diagnosing the client's needs, making the proper prescription of care and can guide the decision-making experienced by the nurse as a leader of the nursing team, promoting the autonomy of the profession (Pereira et al., 2017). The teaching of protocols is fundamental for nursing, since many of the safety problems reside precisely in the fact that professionals are profoundly unaware of the procedures and actions that are inherent to their area of expertise. Valuing their role is a crucial factor for an institutional security policy (Sanches, 2017). Silva et al. (2020) mention the importance of nursing professionals in Brazil, as protagonists in the fight against the coronavirus. The

authors highlight Florence Nightingale's teachings as more current than ever, as basic care was essential to reduce the spread of the disease, such as hand washing, cleaning hospitals and domestic environments. It is clear that practices like these will still make a lot of difference in everyday life around the world, as long as issues like the ones we are living in today prevail. It should be noted that, as a science, nursing is supported by a wide range of theoretical references and specific theories of nursing that underlie the bases of care. This is achieved from the Systematization of SAE in health institutions, today a mandatory requirement for nursing work and operationalized by the Nursing Process (NP). It is noted that the existence of effective protocols for the protection of nursing professionals is an imperative factor for harm-free nursing care and constitutes a primordial element for a change of attitude in the entire assistance community.

**Patient and nursing professional safety in the context of the pandemic:** Health professionals have been working under extreme pressure and must have their most basic needs met in order to provide safe and ethical care to patients. Despite this, a major impasse that professionals face during the COVID-19 pandemic is the fear of contamination by an unsafe work environment, as the crisis, on a global scale, caused the scarcity of PPE, leading to the transmission of COVID-19 in the hospital environment, causing illness and death among health professionals (WHO, 2020; Wu & McGoogan, 2020). In order to generate greater safety and standardization for health professionals and services, WHO has developed standards for the prevention and control of disease transmission, which include: the adoption of care with droplets and contact and with procedures that generate aerosols; providing a surgical mask for suspected patients and performing hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcoholic solution after contact with respiratory secretions. For greater safety for health professionals, patients should remain in isolated beds, preferably with negative pressure. If these beds are not available, patients should be placed one meter apart. In addition, the number of family visits must be limited (WHO, 2020). In the study by Prado et al. (2021) the following question emerges: how can medical resources be allocated during the COVID-19 pandemic without harming other people and aiming to help consolidate the legitimate interests of those involved (health professionals and patients)? It is believed that this question permeates the thinking of many nursing professionals around the world. To answer the question, one should consider the aforementioned shortage of PPE for health professionals working with COVID-19 patients. These emerging questions regarding the allocation of resources, given that these workers are exposed to high viral loads and are susceptible to more diseases serious, are current and still bother frontline thinking. For Adams and Wall (2021), under these conditions, the debate on "the duty to care versus the right to protection" focuses on whether health professionals have a duty to care even when the health system does not protect their health and safety through adequate provision of PPE. The conflict raised is closely linked between the individual right of the professional and their objective duty of care, especially based on the bioethical principle of beneficence, in which the maximization of the benefits of those involved, the avoidance of danger and the reduction of damage to both parties (Simonds & Sokol, 2009). From this perspective, the greatest chance of maximizing benefits occurs when health professionals manage to balance their multiple functions, such as: the duty to care for patients; O duty to protect themselves from being infected in order to remain productive during the period of the pandemic, as well as the duty to protect their friends, their family and neighborhoods and the duty to society in general (Simmonds & Sokol, 2009).

Health institutions are crucial to society's ability to resist and recover from public health emergencies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare professionals are facing many ethical challenges, having to prioritize what they consider to be the most essential elements of care in complex healthcare environments. Thus, support for ethical practice is crucial to the health integrity and well-being of the health workforce. Recognizing and addressing the special challenges that health professionals face when responding to COVID-19 is part of the leadership and civic duty of the health area (Prado et al., 2021). Thus,

healthcare leaders must promote an ethical work environment through the implementation of strategies to support the well-being, morals and personal and professional development of healthcare professionals. Ensuring that healthcare professionals feel they have support, both as healthcare professionals and as individuals, will help sustain individual and team performance over the long term (Adam & Walls, 2020). For Bampi & Grande (2020) it is essential that employers implement different measures to provide adequate support to patients and frontline health professionals, who are already overburdened, and the capacity of the health system to respond to the pandemic will depend on its welfare. These ethical issues can be the cause of serious moral distress among professionals. Thus, the support of a clinical ethics committee and psychological support may be necessary for all health professionals working during a pandemic, as many of them may find working in the grueling and unfamiliar conditions of a pandemic to be difficult and morally challenging and emotionally. Therefore, special attention must be given to the health professional who is at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic (Prado et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

Every job presents its risky conditions, with chances of developing some work accident. In the case of nursing, the chances of an accident become more alarming due to the serious health risk of biological infection for the professional and the patient. So, to ensure the quality of hospital practice, it is necessary to develop protocols that allow greater safety and nursing care. Among the types of existing protocols, the Nursing Care Systematization (SAE) is one of the most elaborated to provide scientific proposals to foster care between nursing and patient. The importance of these debates on safety is highlighted in these times of pandemic, where so many health professionals lose their lives due to contagions that occurred during their medical practice. It is an alarming situation that prompts the urgency of new debates and activities to ensure the safety and quality of the nursing care service, in order to safeguard those who will be at our bedside in the most difficult and vulnerable moments of life.

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