

Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic Brings to Light Decades-Old Nursing Demands

Simone Aparecida Peruzzo¹

ABSTRACT

COVID-10 coping efforts are shining a harsh light on the historical demands of nursing. These include the improvement of poor working conditions, the qualitative lack of personal protection equipment (PPE), and nurse understaffing. These and other matters are advocated for by nursing organizations, which have been waiting for over two decades for the approval of bills in the National Congress. What to make of authorities claiming that our demands cannot be met because we are too many when compared to other professions? Feelings such as disappointment, lack of recognition, senselessness, incoherence, discrimination, and ignorance about the nature of the profession all contribute to our disbelief. It is time society supported this category in such challenges, recognizing the profession's specific characteristics and the leading role played by nurses, providing the category with the conditions it needs to consolidate its social practice with quality and safety.

¹Mestre em Enfermagem pela UFSC, Presidente do Coren/PR, Curitiba,PR

Corresponding author

Simone Aparecida Peruzzo
Address: Rua Brasílio Itibere 3530 ap 22 - 80250-160 - Curitiba- PR
E-mail: simone.peruzzo@corenpr.gov.br

Submission date: 18/05/2020

Approval date: 01/07/2020

How to cite this article:

Peruzzo SA. Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic Brings to Light Decades-Old Nursing Demands. **Advances in Nursing and Health** [Internet]. 2020; 2(2): 8-10.

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The greatest study carried out in Latin America in 2015, funded by the Brazilian Federal Council of Nursing (Cofen), the Pan-American Health Organizations (PAHO) and the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), outlined the professional profile of nurses, nursing aides and nursing technicians. Its results indicate that the social invisibility to which the category is submitted can generate discontent, frustration, and evasion vis-à-vis the lack of laws that regulate working days, adequate adjustment for unhealthy conditions, wage floor, special pension, appropriate nurse staffing, dignified areas for rest between shifts as provided for by law, and ongoing capacity-building. These conditions have already been guaranteed by other professions, including those younger than

nursing.

What to make of authorities claiming that our demands cannot be met because we are too many when compared to other professions? Feelings such as disappointment, lack of recognition, senselessness, incoherence, discrimination, and ignorance about the nature of the profession all contribute to our disbelief.

The physical and mental exhaustion, occupational illnesses, institutional, psychological and physical violence, long periods of medical leaves, commonly justified by stress or depression, in addition to the real need to maintain at least two jobs, compose the daily life of a category that works across all the different health services. The combination of these factors certainly makes patients and workers vulnerable.

The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that six million more nurses are needed around the world to meet the population's healthcare needs.

Well into 2020, WHO director Tedros Adhanon Ghebreyesus stated that "*nurses are the backbone of any healthcare system*" in an official text published on World Health Day, celebrated on April 7 of this year.

The same organization also defined 2020 as “the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife”, a time in which a generally vulnerable category has been put to the test in the context of the battle against COVID-19.⁽¹⁾

In the state of Paraná, there are over 105,000 professionals registered with the Council of Nursing, and in Brazil, about 2.3 million professionals. This represents a true army of mostly women nurses, nursing technicians, and nursing aides. However, this contingent of workers is not enough to meet the demands created by the pandemic. Take for example the need to enlist graduates, students, and nurses who were not active in the profession to take on work or even substitute a colleague contaminated by COVID-10 while on the front. -

The alert issued by WHO and the United Nations (UN) with the Nursing Now Campaign, and by the International Council of Nurses shines a light on the relentless work of nursing organizations, which have been fighting for decades for the recognition of the profession’s nature and responsibility, seeking better working conditions and remuneration.

It is time society supported this category in such challenges, recognizing the profession’s specific characteristics and the leading role played by nurses, providing the category with the conditions it needs to consolidate its social practice with quality and safety. To invest in nursing means to invest and protect the life of the society to which we belong.

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Demandas de décadas de enfermería se manifiestan en la lucha contra la pandemia COVID-19

Simone Aparecida Peruzzo¹

RESUMEN

La lucha contra la pandemia de COVID-19 está exponiendo increíblemente las demandas históricas de la enfermería respecto de las malas condiciones laborales, la falta cualicuantitativa de equipos de protección personal y el subdimensionamiento del equipo de enfermería, entre otras luchas de las organizaciones profesionales que esperan, hace más de dos décadas, las correspondientes aprobaciones de proyectos de ley por parte del congreso nacional. ¿Qué podemos pensar cuando una determinada autoridad afirma que nuestras reivindicaciones no pueden ser atendidas porque somos muchos, en comparación con la cantidad de trabajadores de otras profesiones? Sentimientos como decepción, desvalorización, insensatez, incoherencia, discriminación y desconocimiento de la naturaleza de nuestra profesión determinan nuestra incredulidad. Es hora de que la sociedad apoye a la profesión frente a estos desafíos, reconociendo las especificidades laborales y el protagonismo ejercido por la enfermería, brindándole condiciones de consolidar la práctica social con calidad y seguridad.

¹Mestre em Enfermagem pela UFSC, Presidente do Coren/PR, Curitiba,PR

Autor de correspondência

Simone Aparecida Peruzzo
Rua Brasílio Itibere 3530 ap 22 - 80250-160 - Curitiba- PR
E-mail: simone.peruzzo@corenpr.gov.br

Recibido: 18/05/2020
Aceptado: 01/07/2020

Como citar este artículo:

Peruzzo SA. Demandas de décadas de enferméria se manifiestan em la lucha contra la pandemia COVID-19. **Advances in Nursing and Health** [Internet]. 2020; 2(2): 8-10.