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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

NURSING ANGELS: THE PLAYFULNESS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND HUMANIZATION IN HEALTH

ANJOS DA ENFERMAGEM: O LÚDICO COMO INSTRUMENTO DE CIDADANIA E HUMANIZAÇÃO NA SAÚDE

ÁNGELES DE ENFERMERÍA: LÚDICO COMO INSTRUMENTO DE LA CIUDADANÍA Y LA HUMANIZACIÓN DE LA SALUD

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to identify the perception of companions and/or tutors regarding the importance of Nursing Angels in the treatment of children/adolescents with cancer. ***Method:*** descriptive, exploratory study, with quantitative approach. Data were collected from an interview with 38 companions and/or tutors of the oncology sector of a university hospital. Data analysis and processing were computer-processed in the programs Microsoft Office Excel and Word 2010, presented in tables and analyzed with descriptive statistics. ***Results:*** regarding the feelings of the interviewees after the visit of the Nursing Angels, 44.73% said they felt happy. All the companions (100%) were unanimous in saying that the ludic activities developed by the group of volunteers act positively in the treatment of patients. ***Conclusion:*** at the end of the study, the companions demonstrated the positive impacts that the playful activities developed by the Nursing Angels bring to the pediatric cancer treatment, which completely changes the family and hospital dynamics. ***Descriptors:*** Nursing Oncology; Volunteer; Care Humanization.

RESUMO

Objetivo: identificar a percepção dos acompanhantes e/ou responsáveis quanto à importância dos Anjos da Enfermagem no tratamento para crianças/adolescentes com câncer. ***Método:*** estudo descritivo, exploratório, com abordagem quantitativa. Dados coletados a partir de entrevista com 38 acompanhantes e/ou responsáveis no setor de oncologia de um hospital universitário. A análise e processamento dos dados foram processados em computador no programa Microsoft Office Excel e Word 2010, apresentado em e tabelas e analisados com estatística descritiva. ***Resultados*:** quando ao sentimento dos entrevistados após a visita dos Anjos da Enfermagem, (44,73%) disseram sentisse feliz. Todos os acompanhantes (100%) foram unânimes ao dizer que as atividades lúdicas desenvolvidas pelo grupo de voluntários agem de forma positiva no tratamento dos pacientes. ***Conclusão:*** ao final do estudo, os acompanhantes demonstraram perceber os impactos positivos que as atividades lúdicas desenvolvidas pelos Anjos da Enfermagem trazem para o tratamento do câncer pediátrico, o qual muda completamente a dinâmica familiar e hospitalar. ***Descritores:*** Enfermagem Oncológica; Voluntário; Humanização da Assistência.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: identificar la percepción de los compañeros y/o tutores con respecto a la importancia de los Ángeles de Enfermería en el tratamiento para los niños/adolescentes con cáncer. ***Método:*** estudio exploratorio, descriptivo, con un enfoque cuantitativo. Los datos fueron recogidos a partir entrevistas con 38 compañeros y/o tutores en el sector de oncología de un hospital universitario. El análisis y tratamiento de los datos se procesaron en el ordenador en los programas Microsoft Office Excel y Word 2010, y son presentados en tablas y analizados con estadística descriptiva. ***Resultados:*** cuanto al sentimiento de los entrevistados después de la visita de los Ángeles de Enfermería, 44,73% dijeron que se sentían felices. Todos los compañeros (100%) fueron unánimes en decir que las actividades de juego desarrolladas por el grupo de voluntarios actúan positivamente en el tratamiento de los pacientes. ***Conclusión:*** al final del estudio, los acompañantes demostraron darse cuenta de los impactos positivos que las actividades de juego desarrolladas por los Ángeles de Enfermería llevan al tratamiento de cáncer pediátrico, que cambian completamente la dinámica familiar y del hospital. ***Descriptores:*** Enfermería Oncológica; Voluntarios; Humanización de la Atención.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nursing Angels Institute (IAE – *Instituto Anjos da Enfermagem*) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) whose purpose is to carry out health education activities through activities such as music therapy, bibliotherapy and theater therapy. The NGO was founded in 2004 by the then nursing student Jakeline Duarte, who, inspired by the book "Love is Contagious", written by the American doctor Patch Adams, gathered nursing students who voluntarily act mainly at hospitals, bringing joy, humanization, love and solidarity. The institution initially acted only as a university extension program, linked to the Regional University of Cariri (Urca), but, with the help and encouragement of the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN), IAE grew and is currently present in 18 Brazilian states, and has a partnership with about 23 universities and 21 hospital institutions.[1]

The Nursing Angels (NA) have the social role of training volunteers so that they are able to promote health education and humanization, thus helping to improve the quality of life of hospitalized children. In addition to working at hospitals with joy, the NA performs other activities, such as donation campaigns, courses, publications, events, videos, research and support for public policies. In order to carry out all these activities, the IAE counts on the support of volunteers and receives donations from individuals and companies, in addition to receiving the support of COFEN, the Regional Nursing Councils of each state where it operates, and institutions of higher education.[1]

The playfulness in the hospital environment is able to relieve the stress and anxiety that children and their parents feel during hospitalization. The hospital environment can be very stressful, especially when inpatients are children, because, during this process, they are withdrawn from their social environment and proceed to a completely different routine.[2]

Therefore, playful activities within the hospital environment are extremely important since these activities are capable of transforming the environment, improving the patient's coping capacity as well as the relationship between the child and health professionals.[3] In this way, playfulness brings joy, promotes physical, social and spiritual well-being, thus favoring the establishment of a more pleasant environment.

The playfulness in the hospital environment reduces the trauma of hospitalization by providing patients with quality of life, so playful activities are widely used in the hospital context, especially in long-term pediatric units, such as pediatric oncology units.[4] In these units, children often feel weakened, indisposed, since the treatment against cancer is often long and invasive. Thus, the playfulness comes as an important tool to rescue self-esteem, the pleasure of playing and smiling, as well as allowing the social interaction that the isolation of the hospitalization hinders.[5]

According to data from the José Alencar Gomes da Silva National Cancer Institute (INCA), infant cancer is currently the first cause of death among children and adolescents (one to 19 years). In fact, approximately 12,600 cases of childhood cancer are registered annually throughout Brazil, most of them in the Southeast (6,050 cases) and Northeast (2,750 cases) regions. Therefore, knowing the impact that the treatment against childhood cancer exerts under the children and their families makes using recreational resources in hospitals throughout the country necessary, just as the Nursing Angels has been doing for more than 10 years.[6]

Nurses can insert the playfulness therapy as a tool for health education, guidance and promotion, diversifying the care of hospitalized children, valuing the process of child development, opening space for laughter, joy and appropriation of hospital routine.[7]

This is how the NA work, articulating actions that promote the exercise of citizenship of students and nursing professionals through the formation of groups of volunteers, nursing students, to visit hospitals, with the goal of alleviating the pain and suffering of children with cancer, qualifying groups on playfulness therapy, health humanization, and social responsibility.

In this sense, this study aimed to:

- Identify the perception of companions and/or tutors regarding the importance of Nursing Angels in the treatment of children/adolescents with cancer.

METHOD

Descriptive, exploratory study, with quantitative approach, discussing nursing experiences related to the playful and voluntary work involving the companions and/or tutors of children/adolescents with cancer attended at Oswaldo Cruz Hospital (HUOC), in the city of Recife, Pernambuco (PE), Brazil.

The research sample consisted of 38 individuals. The present study had an unintentional-type probabilistic sample, since the elements of the sample were not chosen; they intentionally relate to the established characteristics.

The inclusion criterion was being a companion and/or tutor of a child assisted in the oncology sector of the HUOC. The exclusion criterion was the companion and/or tutor who were under the age of 18.

The data collection was carried out from August to October 2015, through weekly visits every Wednesday, in the morning. The companions were approached while accompanying the children at the hospital or outpatient care, where they agreed to participate in the study by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF). Only then, the research instrument was applied to the participants, which consists of a sociodemographic questionnaire, which also contains questions relevant to the work carried out by the volunteers of the Nursing Angels Project and their perception of the project.

Data analysis and processing were performed in the programs Microsoft Office Excel and Word 2010, presented in tables and analyzed with descriptive statistics.

This research was forwarded and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of Salgado de Oliveira University (UNIVERSO) under the CAAE number: 43362414.9.0000.5289, according to Resolution of the National Health Council (CNS) 466/12.

RESULTS

The data presented in Table 1 integrate relevant information on the surveyed sample, showing characteristics related to some sociodemographic variables. The most frequent age groups among the companions and/or tutors were between 29-36 years and 37-46 years old, both with the percentage of 34.21%; the majority of the sample (92.10%) consists of women. Most companions (86.84%) were the patients' mothers. Regarding marital status, 50.00% were single, most of the companions and/or tutors said they followed the Protestant religion (52.63%). On average, companions have one or two children (63.16%), and children/adolescents aged 15 years old or over have a percentage of 26.32%. Regarding the educational attainment of the companions and/or tutors, the sample was quite heterogeneous and the most frequent answers were incomplete elementary and high school, both with the same percentages (21.05%). Concerning family income 57.89% receive less than a minimum wage, 53.00% are residents of the urban area and 97.37% reside in masonry houses.

Table 1. Characterization of sociodemographic data of the companions and/or tutors of the children attended in the oncology sector of the HUOC. Recife (PE), Brazil, 2015.

Characteristics	Specifications	n=38	%
Age			
	21-28 years	09	23.68
	29-36 years	13	34.21
	37-46 years	13	34.21
	47-54 years	03	07.09
Gender			
	Female	35	92.10
	Male	03	07.90
Degree of kinship			
	Mother	32	86.84
	Father	03	03.79
	Aunt	02	05.26
	Sister-in-law	01	02.63
Marital Status			
	Single	19	50.00
	Married	11	29.00
	Divorced	02	05.00
	Others	06	16.00
Religion			
	Catholic	17	44.74
	Protestant	20	52.63
	No Religion	01	02.63
Children			
	1-2 children	24	63.16
	3-4 children	10	26.31
	5 or more children children	04	10.53
Child's Age			
	0-2 years	01	02.63
	3-5 years	05	13.16

	6-8 years	07	18.42
	9-11 years	08	21.05
	12-14 years	07	18.42
	15 years or more	10	26.32
Child's Gender			
	Female	17	44.74
	Male	21	55.26
Education			
	Illiterate	01	02.63
	Incomplete Primary School	01	02.63
	Incomplete Elementary School	08	21.05
	Incomplete High School	04	10.53
	Incomplete Higher Education	01	02.63
	Complete Primary School	02	05.26
	Complete Elementary School	07	18.42
	Complete High School	08	21.05
	Complete Higher Education	06	15.08
Family Income			
	< 1 Minimum wage	22	57.09
	1 Minimum wage	02	05.26
	>1 - 2 Minimum wages	01	02.63
	>2 - 3 Minimum wages	03	07.09
	>3 - 4 Minimum wages	02	05.26
	Others	08	21.05
Housing			
	Rural Zone	18	47.00
	Urban Zone	20	53.00
Home			
	House	37	97.37
	Site	**01**	**02.63**

Youngsters in treatment were in the age group between eight months and 19 years. They were all in treatment for the most varied types of cancer (acute lymphoid leukemia, osteosarcoma, ocular melanoma, acute myelogenous leukemia, Hodgkin's lymphoma, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma).

Table 2 shows the children's/adolescents' treatment time, evidencing that 44.74% had a stay of about seven months to one year, 78.95% of the interviewees reported knowing the work of the Nursing Angels. In addition, 76.31% of the companions and/or tutors understand/know what a voluntary work is. The interviewees were unanimous (100%) in saying that the reaction of the children is to be happy after the visit of the NA. Regarding the perception that the companions and/or tutors have on the children's reaction to the activities developed by the NA in their visits, 77.00% answered that the child is much more excited. When asked about their feelings about the NA, 100% of the interviewees said they felt happy. All the companions (100%) were also unanimous in responding that the playful activities developed by the NA volunteer group act positively in the treatment of patients.

Table 2. Perception of the companions and/or tutors of the children attended in the oncology sector of the HUOC regarding the actions performed by the Nursing Angels. Recife (PE), Brazil, 2015.

Characteristics	Specifications	n=38	%
Child's/Adolescent's Treatment Time			
	<1 month	06	15.79
	1-6 moths	05	13.16
	7 months to 1 year	17	44.74
	>1 - 2 years	03	7.89
	> 2 years	07	18.42
Know the work of the Nursing Angels			
	Know	30	78.95
	Do not know	08	21.05
Know what a voluntary job is			
	Yes	29	76.31
	No	09	23.68
Child's reaction after the visit of the Nursing Angels			
	Happy	38	100
	Sad	--	--
	Indifferent	--	--
Impact of the visit of the Nursing Angels for children/adolescents			
	Animated	31	77.00
	Quiet	08	20.00
	Tearful	01	03.00
How do you feel about the visit of the Nursing Angels			
	Happy	38	100
	Indifferent	--	--
In what way does the visit contribute to children's/adolescents' treatment			
	Positive	38	100
	Negative	--	--

DISCUSSION

This study shows that female companions and mothers are in greater numbers (86.84%). Other studies related to childhood neoplasms also found the maternal presence as main companions of young patients with cancer.[8]

The results found in this study show that the family income of these companions (57.9%) is less than a minimum wage. Other studies have already pointed out this low purchasing power due to the family reorganization to face the disease, since many companions leave their jobs so they can follow the treatment of the child with cancer, thus affecting family income and dynamics.[8]

In general, the companions evaluate that cancer treatment is a very stressful process that leaves the child very discouraged. As a positive aspect, they reported that the volunteers' visit brings joy, encourages adherence to cancer treatment, improves patients' self-esteem, reassures the environment, and children feel more excited. Some of the companions even emphasized that the moments of distraction and joy offered by the NA are a differential in the treatment, since the children are more active after the visit, feeling happy and grateful for the action of the volunteers.

The stress brought by the treatment against cancer was something quite quoted in the interview conducted with the companions. Treatment is a phase of intense emotional stress, because the treatment against cancer is not easy and it changes the family dynamics a lot. As a reflection of this change, we can see that, due to the care given to the sick child, his/her brothers/sisters may feel neglected, because the attention previously shared with everyone becomes focused on a single individual. In addition, most families begin to avoid some habits that used to be routine, such as going to a park or closed places, in order to avoid exposing the child, who has a weakened immunity due to treatment.[9]

The care provided to the sick child and the hospitalization distance the family members from the others who stay at home, compromising the family relationship.[10] In this way, the change in dynamics can lead to stress, and the family, in this case, must pass through a restructuring process to provide a restorative and supportive environment.

During hospitalization, the child and parents leave their safe and comfortable environment and follow a new routine composed by successive examinations, medical approaches, interventions, a different

diet, as well as the beginning of a chosen drug therapy.[11] Moreover, it is worth mentioning that pediatric cancer causes a great deal of anxiety, concern and suffering for the family because of biopsychosocial changes experienced by everyone.[12]

The companions' speech reveals that they trust the work developed by the volunteers and realize how the proposed activities reflect positively on the treatment. The laughter renews the patient's self-esteem, softens the potential traumas of hospitalization, humanizes care, improves health-disease-care conditions and so the patient stops prioritizing the negative aspects that the disease has and begins to focus on social relations developed in the new environment.

As for the positive effects of laughter, studies recognize that physical and emotional recovery in the pediatric patient is linked to the release of negative feelings, thus allowing the children in treatment to be more open to recovery, that is, negative feelings only create barriers to recovery and laughter can be an ally for the discovery of a new path. These barriers are not consciously posed, but laughter unpretentiously changes this perspective.[13]

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the companions clearly perceive the importance of the leisure activities developed by the Nursing Angels for the treatment of pediatric cancer, which causes changes in family dynamics and self-esteem. The present study also reaffirmed the idea that the presence of playfulness in pediatric health institutions is very important to reduce the stress that cancer treatment can cause, since the work developed by the Nursing Angels showed that the playful hospital environment only contributes to the treatment, since it brings well-being, reduces the stress that the hospitalization can cause, besides changing the perspective of pediatric patients and their companions. As a result, the environment becomes lighter and the relationship with the health team becomes friendlier.

In this sense, we see that playful activities, currently considered a differential in treatment, should, in fact, be adopted routinely in treatment units throughout the country, since these actions have benefits already proven in clinical treatment and in interpersonal relationships.

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