

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# The challenge imposed by COVID-19. A humanistic view from the nursing profession

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### Mr. Editor:

A new coronavirus was isolated in patients associated with a fish market in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019. It was named SARS-CoV-2 and produced an epidemic in the city that spread rapidly around the world, possibly constituting the largest pandemic since the Spanish flu early in the last century. By the end of March 2020, COVID-19 had been confirmed in more than half a million people worldwide and more than 26,000 patients had died. In Cuba, at the end of the first quarter of 2020, the epidemic phase was declared after demonstrating local transmission.<sup>(1)</sup>

COVID-19 has affected more than 180 countries, has killed millions of people since its emergence, and has imposed the greatest health challenges to date: the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased demand for health care.<sup>(2)</sup>

The confrontation with COVID-19 imposes important challenges to health professionals in Cuba related, fundamentally, to the health care of the population and to the prevention and control of infections in the community and in health institutions. Infection prevention and control at the community level is a dynamic and continuous exercise according to the evolution of the epidemic, which should be evaluated objectively.<sup>(3)</sup>

The performance of nursing personnel in the face of the colossal impact produced by this disease and the care they provide, day by day, to minimize the bodily and psychological damage caused by COVID-19 have been representative.

Florence Nightingale, one of the paradigms of modern nursing, in her model of care, emphasized that nurses should be excellent observers of patients and their environment and that hand washing was a vitally important action in disease prevention. For Dorothea Orem, the goal of nursing was to help the individual to carry out and maintain self-care actions to preserve health and life and to recover from illness and cope with the consequences of illness (or both).<sup>(4,5)</sup>

The nurses of the Health System in Cuba take as referents these theories of Nursing to make their main function, care, the most humanistic action in order to improve and save human lives in the presence of a deadly virus. The protagonism of the Nursing profession during the pandemic period highlights humanism as the most significant and representative value exposed during these years of pandemic by those responsible for patient care.

Their contribution is decisive because they must provide direct care and attention to save lives and reduce suffering, provide emotional support, educate patients and their families, and coordinate infection prevention and control actions.<sup>(6)</sup>

All over the world, nurses and all health teams are at the forefront of the fight to stop the spread of COVID-19 and risk their lives to save others, with heroic dedication and sacrifice, not only in the care of patients in the front line of care in hospitals, but also from the areas of management, policy, community education and research because nursing is a discipline and a science as fundamental and necessary as human care itself. In universal history, and in subsequent decades, the role that health personnel have played in the face of pandemics that have affected the world is evident.<sup>(7,8)</sup>

Nursing care in the face of COVID-19 has been echoed throughout the world by its professionals. Being a nurse implies commitment, dedication and a deep humanistic vocation as they are the ones who, for the longest time, maintain the direct link with patients and their needs.

Health care workers in the Municipality of Quemado de Güines, in the Province of Villa Clara, from primary health care, are part of that marked difference in these difficult times due to their solidary, human and responsible acts, without brakes in the face of the constant spreading, house to house, face to face, of the protection measures such as the use of face mask and hygienic measures such as hand washing and distancing.

The territorial infirmary dressed up for the anti-COVID-19 vaccination. Acts of sensitivity and accompaniment to the sick, to the vulnerable, to the supposedly healthy person suffering from doubts have been appreciable and vital.

Another contribution that shows a humanistic view of the profession, beyond the physical and interpersonal relationship, is the education and instruction to students and graduated professionals by providing them with updates on COVID-19 and on population interventions with vaccine candidates.

Research has been carried out in order to socialize the results of what has been done in the vaccination stage by the nursing staff and the care provided, these are samples, from a critical and human analysis, that the nursing profession has been enhanced in this Caribbean island, but especially in the land of Quemado de Güines.

It is important to highlight the crucial work of the nursing staff in the process of mass vaccination, but especially in the vaccination of children and adolescents in the municipality. It is and has been an altruistic act, a dose of effort and dedication and exhaustion for the long hours and weekends exercising this practice, but also of joy and satisfaction. The stoic attitude of these professionals has been highlighted and, in the authors' opinion, even with objective needs, subjectivity has prevailed, because love and empathy have not been lacking.

The fight for those who, with or without justification, refused to be vaccinated has not ceased. It was known that it would go well, but there were doubts, fear of delay; the population despaired, but when the time came, the mobilization of the nursing staff was fast, safe and efficient, as Abdala and the Soberanas have proved to be.

In this admirable process, the nursing staff not only administered the vaccine, but also participated at all times, before, during and after, and was present in the event of an adverse event.

Even when the COVID-19 situation has been imposed, the care of the decompensated chronic patient, the pregnant woman, the newborn, the newborn, the home patient, the elderly and the cancer patient has not been neglected.

The challenge imposed is unquestionable, it has been and is difficult, strong and extreme moments have had to face the health professional in these times of COVID and, especially, the nursing staff, but nothing that has not made them even stronger in spirit and conscience; the vocation is carried from within and of this if they know the nurses who give themselves with the heart and love in every human act they perform, especially in these two years of pandemic.

Even when in the current context the coronavirus, with its new variants, threatens, the nursing staff will not decline before new calls; this virus has made them and makes them stronger, more human. Every human life is truly worthy and deserves to be lived.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.