

## The use of psychotropic medications in the nursing team



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### ABSTRACT

The evolution of nursing has been accompanied by the emergence of diseases, especially around mental health. The use of psychotropic medications is the alternative for the treatment of these diseases. The

objective of this study is to analyze the use of psychotropic medications in the nursing team and its consequences. This is a literature review, systematic and reflexive, using the descriptors Nursing, Psychotropic Medications and Patient Safety, using the online database. The use of psychotropic substances by nursing professionals is not recent, one of the hypotheses for this habit is the various personalities that make up the nursing team and the risk they are exposed to daily. Anxiety, stress, and sleep disturbances are one of the symptoms that affect these professionals. The use of psychotropic drugs is one of the treatments used for these symptoms, however, these drugs end up being used indiscriminately by nursing professionals, due to the knowledge acquired in the exercise of their profession in relation to these medications, harming the safety of the patient and the professional. It is concluded that the use of psychotropic drugs is not restricted to the hospital area, the absence of supervision of the sale and supply of these drugs does not restrict access, without the need for a medical prescription. The supervision of the use of psychotropic medications, as well as their side effects and the damage they can cause, and finally, therapies aimed at the dependence of these medications, is an alternative to the abusive use of these drugs.

**Keywords:** Nursing, Psychotropic Medications, Patient Safety.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the evolution of medicine and nursing has been accompanied by the emergence of other diseases and also by the concern for the mental health of society as a whole. The changes in our body in the face of situations of danger and threat are mechanisms of our body, causing physical and emotional changes, which are defined as stress. Stress is nothing new in healthcare, research has shown the study since the 1950s:

The first definitions of stress date back to the mid-1950s, and initially classified stress as a non-specific neuroendocrine response of the organism. Later, however, it was considered a



response that involved other systems of the human body, mainly cardiovascular, pulmonary, and renal. Such systems, when affected, suggest a great risk for the development of diseases that prevent or limit the permanence of the worker in the work environment. As a result, stress becomes a public health problem (MORAES FILHO *et al*, 2019, p. 2.)

Because it is a risk factor for the onset of diseases, medicine and the pharmaceutical industry have sought resources in medications to relieve the signs and symptoms of stress, which has been called psychotropic medications. The knowledge of nursing professionals about the effects and form of administration of these medications is a facilitator in how to use them, and therefore, the use is often carried out deliberately.

The use of psychotropic substances by health professionals, as well as by nursing workers, is not a recent event:

The abusive consumption of psychotropic drugs among health professionals is not a recent fact, reports indicate that in 1833 the medical community had its risk of death increased due to complications arising from cirrhosis and intoxication, consequent to the excessive use of medications in this group. One hundred years later, in 1933, anesthesiologists were diagnosed with high consumption of opioids, and this behavior spread among other categories of health workers. (CAIXETA, SILVA and ABREU, 2021, p.189)

The aggravation of mental illnesses is notably accentuated every year, and nursing professionals are often absent from their work activities when they seek medical help or self-medication.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 264,000 people worldwide are affected by depression, which is responsible for about 800,000 suicides per year. Added to this, it is estimated that 3.4% of the global population has an anxiety disorder. (NASCIMENTO, FERREIRA and BATISTA, *apud* WHO, 2021, p.136).

The use of psychotropic medications, when performed abusively, can put the safety of the patient and the professional at risk, which is the objective of our study, which is to analyze the use of psychotropic medications in the nursing team and its consequences.

## 2 DEVELOPMENT

The manuscript systematically and reflexively seeks the use of psychotropic medications by nursing professionals, through a methodology outlined and the bibliographic references available in the online database .

### 2.1 METHODOLOGY

The present study is a bibliographic, systematic and reflexive review, divided into two stages, in the first stage the descriptors Nursing and psychotropic medications were used, in which nine articles were selected from a total of 565 articles, after using the filters Portuguese language, full text and



publications that occurred in the last five years. In the second stage, we used the descriptors psychotropic medications and patient safety, resulting in a single article out of 245 studies, after using the same filters as in the selection of the first stage. The manuscripts were selected from the databases of the Virtual Health Library (VHL).

The choice of categories was due to the low number of studies found in the use of the descriptors already used. For a better analysis of the results, descriptors were chosen, which are the starting points for finding the answers to the initial question of this study.

## 2.2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected in this study refer to the use of psychotropic substances by nursing professionals. For a better understanding of the results found, we present the table (Chart 1); below:

TITLE	AUTHORS (Year)	DESIGN OF STUDY	OBJECTIVE
Safety of Patients with Mental Disorders: Construction of Collective Strategies	VANTIL, Fernanda Cordeiro Sirtoli, <i>et al.</i> (2020)	This is a qualitative study using the <i>COREQ criteria</i> .	To describe the implementation of risk management in the safety of patients with mental disorders through action research.
The use of psychoactive drugs among health professionals	COELHO, Amanda Soares, <i>et al.</i> (2022)	This is an integrative, qualitative and exploratory review.	To relate the use of psychoactive substances by health professionals and their impacts on health and professional life.
Consumption of psychotherapies in the midst of a Sars-COV-2 pandemic	OLIVEIRA, Fernanda Pinto Dantas; SANTOS, Fernando Maia Pereira; DALLAQUA, Bruna (2021)	Literature review study.	To identify whether the pandemic generated by SARS-COV-2 influenced the use of psychotropic drugs during the period of isolation by the population.
The use of psychotropic substances among nursing professionals	SOUZA, Aline Braga <i>et al.</i> (2020)	This is a cross-sectional, quantitative study.	To analyze how the use of these psychotropic substances is present in the lives of nurses.
Analysis of post-traumatic stress disorder in nursing professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic	ALMEIDA, Thaynara Fontes, <i>et al.</i> (2022)	This is an observational, analytical, and cross-sectional study using the <i>STROBE criteria</i> .	To analyze the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the factors associated with the development of PTSD in nurse practitioners during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Use of psychotropic medications by nursing professionals working in an urgent and emergency unit	SANTOS, Maria Paula Bernado dos, <i>et al.</i> (2023)	This is an exploratory, cross-sectional field research study with quantitative data analysis.	OBJECTIVE: To investigate the occurrence of the use of psychotropic medications and the related factors in a nursing team working in an Urgency and Emergency Unit.
Association of occupational stress and	MORAES FILHO, Iel Marciano de, <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Cross-sectional, analytical and quantitative study.	OBJECTIVE: To analyze the association between the level of occupational



use of psychotropic drugs by health professors			stress and the use of psychotropic drugs by health teachers.
Depression, anxiety and the use of psychotropic drugs in nursing professionals: an integrative review	NASCIMENTO, Antony Santos; FERREIRA, Kaellen Gomes Almeida; BATISTA, Jefferson Felipe Calazans. (2021)	Integrative review study.	OBJECTIVE: To analyze the factors involved in the development of depression, anxiety and the use of psychoactive substances (PAS) by nursing professionals.
Abusive use of psychotropic drugs by health professionals	CAIXETA, Aldinei Cotrim; SILVA, Raiane da Costa; ABREU, Clézio Rodrigues de Carvalho. (2021)	This is an integrative review with a qualitative research approach.	Identify the factors that favor the abuse of psychoactive substances by health professionals.
Use of psychoactive substances by health professionals - Nurses	ANDRADE, Graziely Sardou Pereira; PINTO, Kauanny da Silva; BARRETO, Carla Alessandra. (2019)	This is an exploratory research study with a qualitative approach of exploratory literature review.	To discuss the use of psychoactive chemicals among health professionals who work as nurses and whether the use of these substances occurs due to the ease of access to medications or the stress caused by the work environment.

The present study reviewed ten articles addressing the use of psychotropic drugs by nursing professionals, a theme proposed by this manuscript. For a better understanding, in the course of this article, we will address what each research reports on the theme proposed for reflection in this study.

The use of psychotropic substances by health professionals, as well as by nursing workers, is not a recent event:

The abusive consumption of psychotropic drugs among health professionals is not a recent fact, reports indicate that in 1833 the medical community had its risk of death increased due to complications arising from cirrhosis and intoxication, consequent to the excessive use of medications in this group. One hundred years later, in 1933, anesthesiologists were diagnosed with high consumption of opioids, and this behavior spread among other categories of health workers. (CAIXETA, SILVA and ABREU, 2021, p.189)

Nursing is an activity that deals with different personalities and behaviors, in the face of all kinds of risks to which life is exposed. In view of the exposure to these behaviors, we highlight:

[...] the nurse performs an extremely exhausting activity, with an intense routine and great responsibility, which ends up generating situations of anxiety, which affect the individual in such an advanced way as to stimulate the use of psychoactive substances in an attempt to relieve daily tensions. (SOUZA *et al*, 2020, p.7)

The nursing team, being involved in patient care, whether of low or high complexity, ends up fulfilling an extensive workload, leaving little time for leisure or activities that relieve the emotional overload that the work requires:



The emotional exhaustion resulting from such situations can contribute significantly to the development of conditions related to stress and mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety, panic, phobia and psychosomatic diseases, and the use of psychoactive substances may be used to cope with and seek relief from these problems. (ANDRADE, PINTO and BARRETO, 2019, p. 591)

Research data quantify that only 1/4 of nursing professionals do not qualify their work as stressful, as highlighted in the 2021 manuscript:

[...] nursing is constantly in contact with suffering, pain and anxieties that can channel physical and mental suffering, in addition, the provision of services with professional devaluation and lack of recognition are also associated factors, such evidence is demonstrated in the study by Lemes et al. (2015) where 88% of professionals reported stressful work and 22% pointed out inadequate working conditions. (NASCIMENTO, FERREIRA and BATISTA, 2021, p.137)

Several factors end up affecting the mental health of health professionals, generating concern about the safety of patients when receiving care from these professionals and, at the same time, the safety of professionals when performing care.

Examples include physical fatigue, high level of demand, enormous demands, excessive workload, among other factors. All of this ends up having psychological effects, such as anxiety and stress, as well as changes in sleep quality. (RABBIT *et al*, 2022, p.6)

Regarding patient safety, extra care is needed in relation to patients with mental health problems:

In Mental Health care, it is necessary to have a differentiated management, given that the public served has a profile that can predispose to the occurrence of some events, and that can even be harmful to the patient, such as self-aggression, violence and suicide. (VANTIL *et al*, 2020, p.2)

It is known that the routine wear and tear of nursing professionals is under constant discussion in today's society, especially after the advent of the COVID-19 Pandemic:

tag. Healthcare workers are subject to greater psychological distress as a result of working on the front lines in response to the pandemic. In addition, the challenges imposed by this scenario intensify stressful factors, such as the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the restricted number of beds and mechanical ventilators, the lack of knowledge and training, the level of complexity and severity of patients, among other factors. (King James Version) *et al*, 2022, p. 3)

A study conducted in the year after the pandemic shows the increase in the consumption of anxiolytic and sleeping pills, as well as herbal medicines:

[...] A study conducted in pharmacies in Mato Grosso shows a 40% increase in the sale of medicines such as Fluoxetine and Alprazolam between March and August 2020, in addition to the increase in the sale of herbal medicines aimed at controlling the symptoms of anxiety and depression, generating a correlation with an increase not only in individuals properly diagnosed with disorders such as depression and anxiety by professionals, but also warning



of an increase in self-medication with substances that do not require a prescription, such as herbal medicines. (OLIVEIRA, SANTOS and DALLAQUA, 2021, p.4)

In view of the challenges imposed by the pandemic, in addition to the existing ones, it was observed that during the pandemic the risk of nursing professionals developing mental disorders increased considerably:

A study shows that health professionals who provide care to patients with COVID-19, confirmed or suspected, lack attention from health authorities regarding the identification and monitoring of these groups that are at high risk for developing emotional and psychiatric problems. Above all, nurses and nursing technicians, who, although accustomed to facing critical situations, worked directly on the front line during the pandemic, which often negatively affected the mental health of these professionals. (King James Version) *et al*, 2022, p. 6)

A. anxiety experienced by nursing professionals, in the face of the execution of their activities, can generate several mental disorders, such as Mental and Behavioral Disorders (CMD), as reported in the 2023 study:

Health professionals, especially nursing professionals, are the most likely to develop CMDs because they are involved daily in situations that cause stress, related to a large workload, physical and psychological exhaustion, in addition to excessive demands on their work routine. As a result of this stressful work, these people are prone to use psychotropic drugs. (SAINTS *et al*, 2023, p.196)

Mental distress on the part of nursing professionals has been present since before the pandemic, due to factors already mentioned in this study, but it was observed that these intensify in areas where emotional overload is greater, but variable from individual to individual.

[...] It has been common to find these professionals going through a process of mental illness, with an increasing number of cases of depression, various anxiety syndromes, insomnia, suicidal behavior, burnout syndrome, psychotic episodes, as well as excessive use of alcohol and other drugs. (SAINTS *et al*, 2023, p.197)

Studies indicate that alcohol is the illicit substance most used by nursing professionals, this is due to its easy access and because it is considered a "normal" social practice when within limits.

[...] Studies have pointed to alcohol as the predominant substance among nursing professionals. It is known that intense and discriminated alcohol consumption can be harmful to the health of any individual, however, it is pointed out that about 52% of the Brazilian population over 18 years of age consumes some alcoholic beverage (at least once a year). This context is cultural, however the use can be associated as a refuge to personal and mainly work problems. (NASCIMENTO, FERREIRA and BATISTA, 2021, p.143)

It is observed that the use of psychotropic drugs is not restricted only to the hospital environment, but is also seen in the academic area, due to the great pressure that professors suffer to improve indicators and institutional evaluations.



The pressure to prove the professional's efficiency to complete the methods of institutional evaluations causes stress in the teacher. Thus, the first definitions of stress date back to the mid-fifties, and initially classified stress as a non-specific neuroendocrine response of the organism. (MORAES FILHO *et al*,2019, p.2)

The stress level of teaching professionals is due to a set of factors, in the search for a comfortable standard of living, the vast majority having more than one job and work overload.

The level of stress can make the professional incapacitated, because the pressure and stress experienced in their work environment do not prevent the professional from wanting to do their best to guarantee their job, even in the face of work overload, conflicts, professional devaluation and double workload, but all these factors contribute to the professional making use of psychoactive substances. (MORAES FILHO *et al*, 2019, p.7)

In the search for better professional results, they end up making use of psychotropic medications, sometimes becoming dangerous due to their possible side effects.

[...] the exacerbated use of medications and polypharmacy may be predictive factors for decreased quality of life and longevity, due to the lack of knowledge of adverse effects. In this context, these factors are a public health problem, and it is necessary to implement effective and inherent public policies to reduce medicalization and value the use of alternative methods, providing coping with the praxis experienced and the significant improvement of the individual in moral distress. (MORAES FILHO *et al*, 2019, p.7)

In sum, the losses are still unknown by the health and educational institutions of the country, due to the abusive use of psychotropic drugs by their employees, but it is believed to be enormous and also a public health problem.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The abusive consumption of psychotropic drugs in the health area, thus inserting Nursing, in this context, is not new, however, the consumption has become a public health problem, but without much interest on the part of government agencies.

The different personalities that make up a nursing team, as well as teams with several members, sometimes living together for up to 12 hours per shift, end up creating a stressful work environment, adding to an extensive work demand, leaving the professional mentally ill. This, in turn, often resorts to self-medication, due to their knowledge of medications, which does not end up being recorded in the statistics. When professionals resort to specialized medical care, they are sometimes removed from their work functions, causing damage to the institution and public coffers.

The event of the pandemic increased the evidence on the consumption of these medications, believed by frontline professionals, such as Nursing, and then by the psychic and mental suffering faced by nursing professionals in the face of an unknown disease.



The abuse of psychotropic medications is a concern among nursing professionals, due to their working hours, due to their side effects and putting the safety of the professional and the patient at risk.

It is concluded that the use of psychotropic drugs is not restricted only to the hospital area, the absence of supervision of the sale and supply of these drugs does not restrict access to them, often occurring the deliberate sale, without the need for a medical prescription. As a suggestion, the increase in supervision is undoubtedly a factor to be worked on, allied to this, the increase in information about the use of psychotropic medications, as well as their side effects and the damage they can cause, and finally, therapies aimed at dependence on these medications.





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