

Contributions of pharmaceutical assistance and public policies in combating COVID-19 in Brazil



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ABSTRACT

tag. In Brazil, there was a need to restructure and improve pharmaceutical services to deal with the crisis. Government agencies have produced

documents to guide pharmaceutical services, aiming to ensure the supply of health technologies and promote the rational use of these resources. Objective: This study describes the importance of pharmaceutical services in the fight against COVID-19 in Brazil and highlights the contributions of public health policies. Results: The reorganization of pharmaceutical services in the Unified Health System involves ensuring access to health technologies, implementing telepharmacy and promoting the rational use of medicines and safe dispensing. These actions are strategic to disseminate evidence-based information, contributing to the comprehensiveness, resolvability and efficiency of health interventions.

Keywords: Pharmaceutical Assistance, Public Policies, COVID-19.

1 INTRODUCTION

In late 2019, an outbreak of pneumonia erupted in the Chinese city of Wuhan, Hubei province. In January 2020, Chinese researchers identified the causative agent: a new severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus, known as SARS-CoV-2. Originating in a seafood and live animal market, the outbreak quickly spread worldwide and in March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the disease a global pandemic, naming it Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (CRODA; GARCIA, 2020).

From the recognition of this pandemic, numerous demands for the services of the Unified Health System (SUS) in Brazil have emerged. This inevitably resulted in the reconfiguration of operational processes, re-evaluation of care flows, and incorporation of new work procedures. Pharmaceutical care was no exception, with the need to understand both pharmaceutical care services for suspected users or those with COVID-19 and the management activities of technology supply for health institutions (MACIEL *et al.*, 2020).

In view of the expansion of these two areas of action in the context of the pandemic, it was necessary to restructure and improve their actions and services. As a result, several Brazilian government agencies have produced documents to guide the pharmaceutical services of the Unified



Health System (SUS), seeking not only to ensure the sustainable supply of health technologies, but also to promote the rational use of these resources in the provision of health care (CAETANO *et al.*, 2020).

In this sense, this study aims to describe the importance of pharmaceutical services in the fight against COVID-19, as well as the contributions of public health policies in Brazil and their importance for society in the pandemic period.

To contemplate the proposed objective, a narrative review study was conducted. The recruitment of the archives was carried out from June to August 2023, in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (Scielo), National Library of Medicine (PubMed) databases, in addition, a search was carried out for fields that contained archives for health professionals and managers regarding COVID-19. In these websites, the following Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) were incorporated into the search field: "Pharmaceutical Assistance", "Public Policies" and "COVID-19". As an acceptance criterion, articles with similar research objectives were chosen. Regarding the language, articles with Portuguese and English were chosen. As an elimination criterion, articles that were not of interest to the research subject and with languages other than Portuguese or English were excluded.

2 EMERGENCE OF THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (SARS-CO-V-2) AND THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE NATIONAL HEALTH SURVEILLANCE

Since the incident in Wuhan, China, in 2019, acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-COV-2) has spread rapidly around the world due to its ease of transmission, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a pandemic in countries that are adopting measures to contain the new viruses, and it did not take long for there to be numerous investigations into the origin and transmissibility of the disease (MIRANDA *et al.*, 2022)

Several health measures were taken immediately, and actions that could culminate in the prevention of contagion were made possible by governments in Brazil and around the world. Social distancing and the requirement of hygiene measures were part of the entire process to combat the spread of the coronavirus, called COVID-19 early on (SILVA, 2022).

However, Costa (2022) notes that in response to the health emergency of international concern, regulatory changes were made with the aim of facilitating access to medicines not only for the treatment of COVID-19, but also to medicines for the treatment of chronic diseases, thus avoiding long waiting times for administration and crowding in pharmacy services.

In agreement, Melo and Abreu (2022) identify that because the pandemic has spread rapidly, affecting specific groups and with lethality constantly increasing, the pharmaceutical service has been intensified to help control chronic non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and dyslipidemia, comorbidities that hinder the treatment of patients with COVID-19. Changes in the



popular pharmacy program, flexibility in the deadlines for controlled drugs, reorganization of workflows and information on the use of unproven drugs, in addition to the monitoring of therapeutic strategies, were part of the new moment of pharmacy in Brazil.

In this pandemic context, the pharmacy has become an important ally in the fight against the new coronavirus, where researchers around the world have announced many possibilities of what could be used as medicine, but there has been no shortage of controversies, for example, about the use of chloroquine hydroxide and its efficacy or not for the therapeutic care of those infected (LADIES; NASCIMENTO, 2020).

3 PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES AND THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is known that health is considered an inalienable right in Brazil, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988 and based on the creation of the Unified Health System (SUS) and in its article 6 there is the recognition that health is a right for all. According to Article 196, in Section II of the FC, health is a right of all citizens and a duty of the State (PRETEL, 2011).

Law 8.080/90 provides for the conditions for the promotion, protection and recovery of health, in article 6, guarantees the offer of complete drug and therapeutic treatments, implicitly including pharmaceutical assistance, and in view of this reality, it is worth mentioning the National Policy for Pharmaceutical Assistance (PNAF), which through Resolution No. 338/2004 defines pharmaceutical assistance as the set of measures for the promotion, protection, and recovery of individual and collective health, which contribute significantly to access to medicines and favor their rational use (SOUZA, 2020).

In this context, pharmaceutical care is an important component of humanized health, which seeks to ensure the population's access to quality, safe and effective medicines, with actions based on ethics and respect for the patient. The health humanization policy seeks to make services more welcoming and humane, valuing the relationship between health professionals and patients, and pharmaceutical care can contribute significantly to this more careful and caring approach (RIOS, 2020).

Within this conception of humanized health, which is close to the most basic needs of the population, it is also necessary to consider that, despite the existence of highly specialized hospitals, primary or primary care has become the main focus of public health policies in the modern world, which, in a way, has contributed to changing the concept of health (LAVRAS, 2011).



4 ALMA-ATA DECLARATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL HEALTH AND COVID-19

Since the Declaration of Alma-Ata, of September 12, 1978, countries have come to consider that people's health depends much more on basic care, and should be guaranteed by the adoption of government actions aimed at the implementation of ample and accessible medicines, methods and techniques for prevention, promotion and protection of health. directed to the primary health care of the population, which are as follows:

"Primary health care is essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technologies, made available universally to individuals and families in the community, through their full participation and at a cost that the community and the country can sustain at every stage of their development, in the spirit of self-reliance and self-medication. They are an integral part of both the country's health system, of which they constitute the central function and main focus, and the overall social and economic development of the community. They represent the first level of contact of individuals, families and communities with the national health system, whereby health care is brought as close as possible to the places where people live and work, and constitute the first element of a continuous process of health care (DE ALMA-ATA, 1978)."

In this sense, the Declaration of Alma-Ata brought to light the importance of health as a fundamental right of all individuals, highlighting the need for equitable access to primary health services. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed existing disparities in the global health system, highlighting a lack of preparedness and unequal access to health care, especially in marginalized communities. The Alma-Ata Declaration highlighted the need for a holistic approach to health care delivery, emphasizing the importance of prevention and health promotion, rather than just treating disease when it occurs (ARAUJO, 2023).

In the context of the Brazilian public health system, primary care emerges as one of the main pillars of public health policies, assuming the role of a gateway for patients seeking care. Responsible for a wide range of services, from care coordination to referral for more complex cases, primary care involves care at several levels, including the promotion of adequate environmental and nutritional conditions, health education, basic sanitation, and maternal and child care (MENDONÇA, 2018).

In addition, it also involves preparation for events such as family planning, immunizations, and prevention and control of endemic diseases. Preventive exams and essential medicines complement the service provided, along with the cure and rehabilitation of common ailments. In short, primary care is the basis of the public health system, ensuring adequate and compassionate care for all citizens (MAPELLI, 2015).



5 THE IMPORTANCE OF PHARMACEUTICAL ASSISTANCE IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE TO COPE WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Several actions aimed to face the pandemic, as the data in 2020 were challenging, due to the rapid spread of the disease and the lethality of the coronavirus. Thus, there have been organizational changes in the various health sectors, specifically in the provision of pharmaceutical services worldwide and in Brazil in the short and medium term (MELO, 2022).

The need for pharmaceutical assistance goes beyond pandemic prevention and control, but is also linked to providing services to people by providing basic information about COVID-19, such as the signs and symptoms of the disease and how to prevent it. That is, safe guidelines regarding the use of masks and proper hand washing and other preventive care. Thus, it is important that pharmacists assume their role, in addition to their technical and scientific attributions, of educating the population about the correct use of medicines and possible drug interactions in the treatment of COVID-19 and thus meeting the needs and guidelines of patients (BARROS, 2021).

Pharmacy is not only a technical-scientific area, but encompasses a series of multidisciplinary knowledge, including anthropology, sociology and communication with patients, the pharmacist must have a holistic understanding of people and their health needs (LAMPERT, 2002).

It is the duty of the pharmacist to emphasize preventive health measures to improve public health, optimize pharmaceutical care, and promote changes in the habits regarding medicine of individuals, families, and communities. One of its essential activities is to facilitate communication with patients about the use of medications, encouraging them to read the package insert and ensuring that they perfectly understand their treatment and as a prominent professional in the health area, the role of the pharmacist is extremely important and should be valued (MAXIMINO, 2023).

6 THE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR IN BRAZIL IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

Health is a complex topic that goes far beyond biological issues. We know that factors such as social, economic, educational, political and environmental conditions have a major impact on people's health. Therefore, maintaining health is not only about fighting diseases, but also about creating favorable conditions for individuals to take care of themselves and restore their health when necessary (SOUSA, 2023).

In this sense, pharmaceutical activities play a fundamental role, which goes far beyond the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. It is necessary for pharmacists to act in an interdisciplinary and intersectoral way, influencing the social determinants of health and contributing to the creation of healthy environments (ARAUJO, 2022).

Thus, pharmaceutical performance is an important complementary tool to combat health challenges in times of pandemic. With a collective or individual approach, pharmacists can offer



targeted procedures to health service users, contributing to the promotion of the population's health and well-being (OLIVEIRA, 2022).

According to Calderar et al. (2022), during the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges faced by pharmaceutical services were multiple and required quick and efficient adaptation in several professional areas. Pharmacists have had to deal with the fear of contagion, misinformation, and uncertainty regarding the efficacy of treatments, which has made their task even more complex. Despite these obstacles, pharmaceutical professionals have increased their interest in collaborating in the fight against the virus and have intensified their activities, making their work even more relevant in the current socio-political context.

The adequacy and orientation of the procedures necessary for treatment during the pandemic require a deep understanding of the complex situation experienced. Pharmaceutical assistance in public pharmacies and the strict adoption of prevention measures have become essential to ensure the continuity of health care for the population (SANTOS *et al.*, 2022).

Despite the difficulties, pharmaceutical professionals have been striving to fill the gap in knowledge about the etiology and efficacy of drugs in the treatment of COVID-19, to provide the population with safe and efficient care. It is evident that pharmaceutical care with safe management and dialogue with multidisciplinary teams has worked intensively to ensure access to essential medicines, becoming a fundamental asset for public health during the pandemic (MIRANDA; SILVA, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the importance of pharmaceutical services and the need for investments in this sector. It is necessary to ensure the training of health professionals, adequate infrastructure, and access to medicines, so that the population can count on a quality and efficient service (CHENCHI, 2021).

7 FINAL THOUGHTS

Pharmaceutical Services and Public Policies have played a fundamental role in the fight against COVID-19 in Brazil. In the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis, the contribution of these areas has been highlighted in ensuring access to medicines, tests, and equipment essential for the treatment and prevention of the disease.

Through the implementation of effective strategies, such as the expansion of the national production capacity of pharmaceutical inputs, the coordination of distribution and logistics actions to supply health units throughout the country, and the creation of monitoring and guidance programs for the population, Pharmaceutical Services and Public Policies have been allies in the search for solutions to contain the advance of the virus.



Investment in research and development of new drugs and vaccines, articulation with international health organizations, and the promotion of health awareness and education campaigns have proven to be effective strategies to face the pandemic. In this sense, it is crucial to continue strengthening Pharmaceutical Services and Public Policies as fundamental pillars for the continued fight against COVID-19 in Brazil and the strengthening of the health system.



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