

Nursing care and sexuality in Oncology for penectomized individuals

Cuidado de Enfermagem e sexualidade em oncologia para o indivíduo penectomizado

Cuidado de Enfermería y sexualidad en oncología para el individuo que sufrió penectomía

Danielle de Jesus Leite Cruz dos Santos^{1,II} ; Sueli Carneiro^I ; Rita da Graça Carvalhal Frazão Corrêa^{II} 

^IUniversidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Brasil; ^{II}Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luis, Brasil

ABSTRACT

Objective: to provide reflections on nursing care with an approach to sexuality for the health of men undergoing penectomy for penile cancer. **Content:** reflective study developed from readings in scientific productions on Nursing care and sexuality for the penectomized cancer patient, in the light of Martin Heidegger's ontological and theoretical thoughts and assumptions. **Final considerations:** the new conditions imposed by illness from penile cancer and the mutilating treatment, penectomy, require Nursing that addresses sexuality, considering the individual in its entirety and with an emphasis on care with a perspective on human existential depth and subjectivity.

Descriptors: Nursing; Philosophy; Penile Neoplasms; Nursing Care; Sexuality.

RESUMO

Objetivo: proporcionar reflexões sobre o cuidado de enfermagem com abordagem à sexualidade para a saúde do homem penectomizado por câncer de pênis. **Conteúdo:** estudo reflexivo construído a partir de leituras em produções científicas sobre o cuidado de Enfermagem e a sexualidade para o paciente oncológico penectomizado, à luz dos pensamentos e pressupostos ontológicos e teóricos de Martin Heidegger. **Considerações finais:** as novas condições impostas pelo adoecimento por câncer de pênis e o tratamento mutilador, a penectomia, exigem uma Enfermagem que aborde a sexualidade, considerando o indivíduo em sua totalidade e com ênfase no cuidado com perspectiva na profundidade e subjetividade existenciais humanas.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Filosofia; Neoplasias Penianas; Cuidados de Enfermagem; Sexualidade.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: proporcionar reflexiones sobre el cuidado de Enfermería con abordaje a la sexualidad para la salud del hombre que sufrió penectomía por cáncer de pene. **Contenido:** estudio reflexivo construido a partir de lecturas en producciones científicas sobre el cuidado de Enfermería y la sexualidad para el paciente oncológico que sufrió penectomía, a la luz de los pensamientos y presupuestos ontológicos y teóricos de Martin Heidegger. **Consideraciones finales:** las nuevas condiciones impuestas por la enfermedad por cáncer de pene y el tratamiento mutilador, la penectomía, exigen una Enfermería que aborde la sexualidad, considerando al individuo en su totalidad y con énfasis en el cuidado con perspectiva en la profundidad y subjetividad existenciales humanas.

Descriptores: Enfermería; Filosofía; Neoplasias del Pene; Atención de Enfermería; Sexualidad.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing care in Oncology needs to involve humanized assistance considering varied and complex aspects, including scientific knowledge and strategies to deal with situations that allow mitigating suffering, as well as improving quality of life¹. In the case of penis neoplasms, such care is extremely relevant to public health, as it corresponds to a problem that is still incident in developing areas, affecting men of low socioeconomic levels and also reaching their family members due to the limitations inherent to the disease, the treatment itself and with all sort of implications, including emotional ones².

In Brazil, penis neoplasms can represent up to 2% of all male cancer cases with an aggressive evolution, being responsible for more than 1,000 penectomy surgeries in this universe, with psychological effects on the patients for involving and compromising the reproductive and sexual organs³. In this context, penectomized patients need to seek a new way of life and perspectives, as the surgery does not only remove an organ, but also the entire social construct and what it means to being a man. This process is based on changes in the routine and on accepting amputation of the penis, which is contextualized as the greatest symbol of masculinity⁴.

For nurses working in Oncology and devoted to caring for these individuals, the relationship with themselves, with others and with the world goes beyond the daily actions inherent to the assistance routine, due to the need to deal with existential issues and for allowing themselves to understand the relevance of assisting individuals with cancer, involving

Corresponding author: Danielle de Jesus Leite Cruz dos Santos. E-mail: danielle.cruz@huufma
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the very meaning of life^{5,6}. The issue in question trespasses the routines related to cancer treatments and sheds some light on how much can nurses devote to care in all its complex and subjective aspects, under an existential panorama, to allow penectomized patients to recognize themselves in this health and disease process¹.

Thus, to uphold this discussion, of a reflexive character, Heidegger's assumptions⁷ on existential analysis were used, in the perspective of considering that the meaning of Being involves life's phenomenon and experiences, as well as the meanings assigned by those who undergo them. Therefore, it is necessary to understand it from the perspective of thinking individuals beyond the biologic and ontic aspects, in order to see them as beings-in-the-world who question, recognize that they can decide for themselves and are conscious of the finitude of their Being⁸.

In this scenario, philosophical discussions can influence contribute to reflections about the Nursing care practices, as they allow thinking about coexistence before the perception of the other's existence, considering existential conditions like finitude, self-understanding, and the relentless search for a meaning for life.

Given the above, the following question arises: What can be understood to offer the best Nursing care possible for the health and sexuality of a being-in-the-world man, who was penectomized due to penis cancer?

To answer this question, the objective of this study was to provide reflections on Nursing care for the health and sexuality of men penectomized due to penis cancer, anchored in Martin Heidegger's ontological approach⁷.

CONTENT

It is important to address Nursing care in health and sexuality regarding penis cancer, an organ full of meanings not only for men but also for society, as it is a problem that affects the very meaning of being a man in a still incipient men's health care system⁴. Regarding the penis cancer diagnosis, in general, it is known that it is made only at an advanced stage, with presence of some severe symptom; in view of this, the process to be adopted, oftentimes inevitably, is the penectomy, a surgery for total or partial penis removal⁹.

The relationship of penis cancer with men's emotional state is not only linked to the anatomical issue but also has a social and cultural nature regarding self-image, virility, anxiety and, in general, quality of life. Thus, weakening leads most men to abandon treatment, risking their health and even their life¹⁰.

For the nurses responsible for the care of these patients, it is indispensable to establish efficient communication, even easing listening about the sexual problems, in order to ensure that the treatment goals are achieved, as the approach to sexuality in health care is omitted many times, even overlooked^{9,11}. Understanding that care involves meeting human needs of any sort in all their dimensions, it becomes necessary to get closer to the other in order to understand the entire context about existence of the Being, allowing for a comprehensive care conception^{12,13}.

Therefore, in this sense Martin Heidegger⁷ is brought into the discussion for a better understanding and a possibility to reflect about care as a condition inherent to life itself, to existence, where sexuality appears linked to genitalia in a health condition that simultaneously involves suffering from cancer and the possibility and perspective of improvements or cure¹⁴. For this, it is indispensable that nurses rethink their practices, competencies and skills to adapt to other care demands that, in addition to individualized, is also complex and multidimensional, devising new ways of dealing with the difficulties imposed by the current pandemic, and also meeting the cancer patients' needs^{8,15}.

Thus, nurses that assist cancer patients need to understand care so that the approach to sexuality is included in the assistance provided to individuals penectomized due to penis cancer, in order to systematize and implement care interventions that can be valid for the patients and for their families, providing better quality of life^{1,10}. Considering this scenario, by reflecting on the care provided to penectomized cancer patients, it is necessary to understand them from the ontological perspective of their existence, to allow for the construction and support of comprehensive and more human health care¹⁶.

Treatments that prioritize preservation of the penis are the first choice in the case of earlier diagnoses, when there are options prior to organ amputation, ensuring a favorable prognosis in relation to the sexual life of men with penis cancer, including the possibility of erection, ability to penetrate and even orgasm¹⁷. Regarding their male self-image, the impact caused by penectomy on individuals that undergo the surgery can lead them to attribute new meanings to the representations in their life context related to absence of the organ, with maintenance of social and individual occupations, although with reduced sexual activity, mainly due to dyspareunia complaints¹⁸.

An individual subjected to penis removal surgery faces the challenge to discover how he should behave or act sexually before his partner, considering the entire meaning that permeates the conception of how indispensable genitality is, which eventually reduces sexuality to coitus⁹. Therefore, for men subjected to total or partial penectomy, the harms caused by the loss of the entire organ, or part of it, exert impacts not only on sexual-related aspects but also on their entire social structure and activity, with the possibility of substitution or readjustment of their male duties related to protection and family support appearing in a resilient way¹⁸.

In this scenario, it is important to understand that sexuality encompasses from the conception of a basic human need to the exchange of energy that involves sensations and feelings that, therefore, go beyond coitus, with the possibility of representing a fundamental aspect for rehabilitation and even better survival^{10,14}.

Health and sexuality in Oncology and care based on Heidegger

Talking about sexuality in health care is still distant and difficult, both for the patients and for the professionals responsible for the care provided, oftentimes represented by silence for everyone involved in the process¹⁰. Oncology care is concerned with the search for a relentless improvement in quality of life from the time the diagnosis is disclosed to the continuous and painful treatments, regardless of the prognosis, and is loaded with reflections about the meaning of life and finitude of the Being, even for those who provide care⁶.

In the scope of the Oncology scientific production, discussions about care from the perspective of existential analysis can subsidize Nursing for a reflection of the praxis about health care and sexuality and, thus, provide assistance that is concerned with the person's integrality¹⁹. The approach to the care for cancer patients on this theme has room for improvements: [...] understanding sexuality and its evaluation in quality of life; asking broad questions; encouraging the patient to ask questions and explore their sexual concerns; and being an objective listener, avoiding making assumptions about the value of sexuality and privacy [...] ^{10:570}.

Even with the entire technological apparatus and the performance of the multidisciplinary team involved in care, cancer represents a situation surrounded by fears and meanings, loaded with pain and hopelessness and that, therefore, requires going towards deconstruction of the subject to reconstruct and attribute a new meaning to the Human Being as a being-in-the-world^{8,12}. For a man penectomized due to penis cancer, a number of implications about masculinity may appear, related to the difficulty or even impossibility to reach coitus. Consequently, sexual activity for these individuals starts not having its meaning merely in the genital sphere, also involving other pleasure-related aspects^{9,10}.

Therefore, as human care is the foundation of Nursing work, it is necessary to understand care as the condition of existence itself and indispensable to preserving life¹⁵. Regarding that, in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger⁷ proposes reflections about existence and places care as human beings' own Being for being-in-the-world, subjected and exposed to social situations and, from this, building their own existence, always requiring care for themselves, for the other and for the world, being-there or *Dasein*.

Heidegger presents care, *Sorge*, as the need to better understand the Being⁷. It is from this that it is inferred that understanding the other in their existence and building a relationship of trust can mean the most important elements for those who provide care, especially when all the burden involved with a penis cancer diagnosis and the indication of penectomy are considered¹⁸⁻²¹.

In addition, according to Heidegger, care is analyzed as the human condition intrinsic to life and to existence itself, to the extent that individuals devote themselves to self-care, in a singularization process that identifies each person's way of Being according to the stubborn commitment of one's Being and of other beings⁷.

With this, the importance of establishing a bond between nurses and patients to provide for dialog and favor listening is highlighted, as a penectomized individual needs to learn how to live without the organ, seeking a new meaning for being a man without this part whose social representation of masculinity was strongly built¹⁹. In light of this, the process of suffering from cancer allows for the *Dasein*, a free being with autonomy about its decisions to recognize, in the core of its existentiality, that there is an end. With that, continuing to seek the best for self-care can provide the being-there with the necessary independence and self-efficiency for survival^{13,22}.

Regarding this conception of finitude of the Being, Heidegger brings about the factual condition as existence of the being, the possibility of the real for being-in-the-world and with the understanding that, consequently, the *Dasein* sees itself as a being-for-death²³. In this sense, the *Dasein* has existential finitude and needs to discover the temporality of its Being with the world that surrounds itself and with itself, being aware of its factuality and that it is a Being destined to the end, thus strengthening its way of being in the world²⁴.

About existential analysis, for men that lost their penis due to cancer, it is thought in the factuality associated with temporality and the *Dasein* as a being-in-the-world and as a being-for-death, anxious to understand its existence in a factual world^{8,23}. In its mission focused on the existential analysis of the being-there as a factual being, Heidegger's philosophy presents factuality as something that has already happened and that turns authentic existence into the understanding that the being-for-death represents the essence of authenticity^{4,25}.

In this perspective, to understand the foundation of time, of a being-for-death in its singularity and capable of defining their own path, Heidegger's philosophy in *Being and Time* alerts to the construction of a decision being who, faced with factual possibilities, carries with it anguish for the responsibility provoked by making its choices²⁵. In this universe, acknowledging factuality allows the being-in-the-world, who understands its finitude, to always renew and rethink the situations that involve care for decision-making²⁶.

Consequently, when thinking about the senses of health and sexuality of patients penectomized due to penis cancer, the understanding that Nursing needs to comprehend its essence emerges, in order to enhance individualized care and allow patients to take part in their treatment with autonomy, even if restricted by the factuality of the world and the power-being of the *Dasein*^{10,12,25}.

According to Heidegger, there is a connection between the *Dasein* and the factuality of the world related to time, not as duration but as an understanding of the being based on phenomenological evaluation, reinforcing that the bond of a man with his experiences speaks about the being-in-the-world, identified in time and space^{19,25}.

Also, about the understanding of the singularities of the Being and its relationship with the world's context, which are expressed by behavioral actions and manifestations, the Being's ontologic view to understanding itself and the other is placed in an adaptation movement built between the care provider and the care recipient²⁶. It is therefore reinforced that the anguish of freedom and responsibility faced with the Being's singularity for choosing its own opportunities is up to the *Dasein*, providing individuals with a horizon of possibilities for their existence^{23,24}.

Therefore, the subjectivity of the meanings attributed by the Being that experiences a penectomy to treat cancer in an organ invested with representations, especially for sexuality, constitutes a challenging situation also for those who provide care and worry about comprehensively meeting the individual's needs²⁷. Finally, "[...] Authentic care enables the *Dasein* to assume its responsibilities and choices, in order to achieve health and well-being. Consequently, it provides freedom and conditions to live its own Being [...]"^{10:570}.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The philosophical reflections anchored in Heidegger's existential analysis can allow launching a new perspective at the condition of penectomized men and their interaction with themselves, with the world and with the construction of reality, as it is a moment marked by adaptations involving the perception of the Being and how it will identify after the penectomy.

Addressing care and sexuality in Oncology and the health of penectomized men constitutes a challenge, as it leads to questioning Nursing and health care models and, in addition, it corresponds to a vast field to be explored, especially for presenting existential issues and their implications for care.

Finally, it is understood that the discussion has just begun, especially for the Nursing praxis, which may contribute to identifying situations that will interfere in the adaptation of sexual life and its repercussions, as well as in the quality of life of the patients under its care, considering that, in addition to complex, health care processes are dynamic.

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Author Contributions

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