



FREE COMMUNICATION

## SELF-CARE AND SPIRITUALITY IN TIMES OF CONTINGENCY DUE TO COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To reflect on self-care and spirituality in times of contingency due to COVID-19.

**Development:** In view of the global declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, different control measures have been implemented worldwide, highlighting voluntary physical isolation in order to contain the propagation of the virus; thus, mankind faces a very unusual phenomenon where distancing stands out. Foucault, Heidegger, and Watson contemplate elementary concepts to reflect on introspection and spirituality as types of self-care, allowing the individuals to effectively face isolation, while fostering their resilience and development as human beings.

**Final considerations:** The type of spiritual care that Nursing can provide is an area which turns into the main interest in order to contribute in the mental health of the people in isolation, that is, an opportunity for the promotion of health.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Nursing Care; Covid-19; Social Isolation; Spirituality; Philosophy.

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## O AUTOCUIDADO E A ESPIRITUALIDADE EM TEMPOS DE CONTINGÊNCIA POR COVID-19

### RESUMO

*Objetivo:* refletir sobre o autocuidado e a espiritualidade em tempos de contingência por COVID-19.

*Desenvolvimento:* a partir da declaração global da pandemia de COVID-19, diferentes medidas de controle foram implementadas em todo o mundo, destacando-se o isolamento físico voluntário para conter a propagação do vírus; assim, o ser humano enfrenta um fenômeno desconhecido, no qual o isolamento torna-se essencial. Foucault, Heidegger e Watson contemplam conceitos elementares para refletir sobre introspecção e espiritualidade como formas de autocuidado, permitindo que o indivíduo enfrente efetivamente o isolamento, promovendo, por sua vez, sua resiliência e desenvolvimento humano.

*Considerações finais:* o cuidado espiritual que pode ser oferecido a través da enfermagem é uma área que concentra o foco de interesse a fim de contribuir com a saúde mental de pessoas com deficiência, isto é, uma oportunidade para a promoção da saúde.

*DESCRIPTORIOS:* Cuidados de Enfermagem; Covid-19; Isolamento Social; Espiritualidade; Filosofia.

## EL CUIDADO DE SÍ Y LA ESPIRITUALIDAD EN TIEMPOS DE CONTINGENCIA POR COVID-19

### RESUMEN:

*Objetivo:* reflexionar sobre el autocuidado y la espiritualidad en tiempos de contingencia por COVID-19.

*Desarrollo:* ante el pronunciamiento global de la pandemia por COVID-19, en el mundo se han implementado distintas medidas de control, destacando el aislamiento físico voluntario a fin de contener la propagación del virus; así, el ser humano se enfrenta a un fenómeno poco cotidiano donde resalta el distanciamiento. Foucault, Heidegger y Watson contemplan conceptos elementales para reflexionar sobre la introspección y la espiritualidad como formas de auto cuidado, permitiéndole al individuo afrontar efectivamente el aislamiento, al mismo tiempo que fomentar su resiliencia y desarrollo humano.

*Consideraciones finales:* el cuidado espiritual que puede proveer la enfermería es un área que se convierte en el foco de interés para contribuir en la salud mental de las personas en aislamiento, es decir, una oportunidad para la promoción de salud.

*DESCRIPTORIOS:* Cuidado de Enfermería; Covid-19; Aislamiento Social; Espiritualidad; Filosofía.

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays a health contingency has been established worldwide, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which started by late 2019 and is currently in progress with a high incidence of cases<sup>(1)</sup>. Worldwide, governments have implemented sanitary measures which demand from people to stay in voluntary or mandatory isolation. In Mexico, on April 20th, 2020, the Health Secretariat declared Phase 3, which carries along strict isolation measures and the protection of people in vulnerable conditions<sup>(2)</sup>.

As a type of protection to reduce contagion, isolation also brings along effects on mental health. By itself, it can produce high levels of anxiety, stress, sadness, and other symptoms that alter people's mental health<sup>(3,4)</sup>. Added to that, the notion of exposure and the possibility of contagion, as well as the enormous quantity of media information and exposure, together with social and economic imbalance, make this problem a complex one.

This pandemic has exposed the various deficits in mental health that the population suffers, and which do not allow an important proportion of people to face isolation in a healthy manner<sup>(5)</sup>. Therefore, the need has been evidenced to implement mental health promotion strategies that allow people to develop a specific resilience to this situation, which has become overwhelming<sup>(6)</sup>.

It is necessary to reflect on the types of self-care, which go beyond the physical realm; among the different manifestations of self-care there is also spirituality, seen as way to find oneself, to connect with nature, sometimes associated with some deity, and which can include religious connotations<sup>(7-10)</sup>. In this sense, spirituality as type of care fosters introspection and endows human beings with the ability to contemplate themselves. Likewise, this type of self-care facilitates the development of resilient strategies where, through people's beliefs and practices, allows them to face complex and difficult situations. In a minimal sense, the ideal of spirituality supposes for the individual being able to attain balance between mind, body, and spirit<sup>(11)</sup>.

Phenomenologically, Foucault approaches spirituality as a way to act on life itself<sup>(12)</sup>, on self-care actions, a resource that human beings find to indulge in peace, well-being, and contemplation. From this integrated perspective, self-care constitutes itself as the highest type of personal conscience, which promotes transcendence in the human being. Consequently, taking care of the body is essential, as it is taking care of the conscience and of the spirit, which heals and attributes meaning to life itself. In spirituality as a type of care, Heidegger approaches taking care of oneself and preoccupation as the first types of care of the human being<sup>(13)</sup>, meeting the need of the spiritual practice to transcend; self-care based on spirituality would be the way to understand the daily situations and to find meaning in the experiences lived.

Adding this first reflection, then the spirituality which is part of the modalities of human care is not so much of a type of resignation but an opportunity to learn with a specific purpose, which coadjuvates in establishing the meaning of life for each individual. Nevertheless, for this to happen it is fundamental to contemplate connections beyond the religious phenomena culturally established in certain historical contexts. For example, in the Mexican and Latin American scenario, this context is linked to the practices of Catholicism and Christianity, reason why it is pertinent to weigh the elements of that religious contact, as well as certain beliefs which can even not be fully experienced in the current situation of the health crisis.

In this reflection about some elements of spirituality, from the construct of self-care, a number of elements are identified, such as transcendence and contemplation. Integrated, they would allow the Nursing staff to reflect on the very process of spiritual care and, in turn, develop elements to promote spirituality in times of crisis with disciplinary reflection as a starting point.

In view of the aforementioned, the purpose of this article is to reflect on self-care, spirituality, contemplation, and transcendence in times of contingency due to COVID-19, with some concepts by Foucault, Heidegger, and Watson as referents.

## DEVELOPMENT

Engrossed in their daily routine, human beings do not contemplate themselves; when their ways of being do not allow them fulfillment, they are continually thinking that the "being" is limited to their work activities, to performing a role, to develop an action. We thus identify temporary roles so that, when chaos emerges, the work activities are suspended, the maternal or paternal role is enhanced in view of the change in school activity, and human beings find no more than crisis for not suspending daily life. In that moment, and as path of searching and finding oneself, spirituality becomes feasible and can constitute itself as a type of care with different channels or strategies.

With respect to self-care, Foucault<sup>(12)</sup> signals an interrelation among the diversifications of one's own ways of being, certain preoccupation about oneself which provides balance mechanism, whereas Heidegger brings along the modes of being. It would be common that, in daily life, human beings be involved in ephemeral conducts, thoughts and relationships, without any interest in knowing who one is or in being oneself, but for what happens in the world to respond to that as best as they can. It is precisely Heidegger that places spirituality as a part of life's intentionality, the notion of self-care searches meaning through spirituality as a way to find knowledge and sense<sup>(14)</sup>.

From Foucault's<sup>(12)</sup> view, spirituality responds to an act of knowing by and for oneself, so that human beings access full knowledge of the truth in a process of introspection and human development, which allows them to attain the self-knowledge that would let them transform their own lives, as it manifests a relation of self-understanding. In this sense, spirituality as a path would allow attaining self-contemplation and of the present time through reflection<sup>(14)</sup>, understood as a type of self-revelation.

Therefore, spirituality could constitute itself as an element of agency in mental health, which grants people an understanding of the difficult moment, a reflection on the isolation they experience in a particular way, a mode of analysis of the health situation. Seen as such, spirituality becomes a self-care action, care which, in Heidegger's words, is a type of understanding *per se*<sup>(13)</sup>. Therefore, far from being a period of crisis, isolation becomes an opportunity for inner work on what one is and on what one does.

For Watson<sup>(15,16)</sup>, care is and act which goes beyond the physical realm and the preoccupations inherent to the modes of human presence. That is to say, it contemplates the emotional and spiritual dimensions as a part of physical care, reason why the science of care would have to be promoting actions that allow individuals to get closer to themselves, even if painfully. One way to understand the aforementioned is visualizing that the way of acting in daily life not necessarily constitutes an authentic personal sense. In view of the above, spirituality is weighted as a type of care; "creating a subtle atmosphere of energetic healing at all the levels of conscience, in which integrity, beauty, comfort, dignity, and peace are enhanced"<sup>(21:6)</sup>.

Engrossing in the unusual, being in a changing and different environment, can bring preoccupation along. This preoccupation is the first sign of adaptation, since it is recognizing the unknown and the possible harm it can cause. In that respect, Foucault<sup>(12)</sup> identifies that preoccupation tends to be the first response of the being to its existential doubts. It first appears as a type and this type can stay away from the real self-knowledge; currently, isolation would lead to a confrontation of the very reality of human beings and of their weaknesses, those which they even do not contemplate.

Among the types of self-care, spirituality fosters the search for oneself, even contemplating the soul, which Foucault approaches as the question of the self (*heautou*). "Taking care of oneself means caring for one's soul: I am my soul"<sup>(12:46)</sup>. The soul turns out to be an internal movement of the self which becomes an own action, distant from the Christian conception alluding to a dichotomy of the being between body and soul, as if they were two separate things. However, the soul is action in movement of the being, and its manifestations expressed in self-care, alluding to physical well-being and to the search of meaning and truth; not as a unique reason, but one of personal sense.

Thus, the contemplation of human beings in these moments would have to take them to a full search for the truth, the truth about the self. This auto-contemplative process would be associated to continually wondering who they are faced with themselves and with the world. Foucault mentions that "to get to the truth, the subject must transform itself in that something different"<sup>(12:38)</sup>. Spirituality becomes something renewing, which allows people to recognize even what they find uncomfortable, and thus access new ways of thinking and of action with themselves and their purpose in life. However, it is to be recalled that, before spiritual conscience there is care as the reason to search for the necessary strategies to face complicated situations like the current ones: despair, anxiety, isolation. In this respect, Heidegger mentions that "the general characterization of the temporality of care is that of granting visibility to the impropriety of the Dasein in its specific temporality"<sup>(14:321)</sup>.

Spiritual care<sup>(17-19)</sup> per se is the contemplation of the meaning of the being, for which it is necessary to go through various levels of spiritual meditation; the movement of the being for the struggle of a true encounter with itself. For the being to find itself, self-knowledge is necessary; but self-knowledge requires coming into contact with more mundane senses: fear, uncertainty, void, and nostalgia, to name only a few elements. Each movement of the being in this path should contemplate basic principles, product of a reflection of the being with itself. Interacting with the soul in search of its truth would reveal the most supreme values of the being. With self-knowledge, the being would then discover the way to care for the other, a mode of proxy, an existential interest for the other, thus resulting in self-understanding.

The Nursing science and its professionals now have a way to promote transcendental care by means of community actions of health promotion from the spiritual plane. In this period of chaos, this agency capacity of Nursing would contribute to a different vital organization, oriented at being able to contemplate oneself in one's own human development and growth; care is also transcendence.

Some applications can be taking care of the environment to the extent possible in moments of personal reflection, a clean environment, favoring the human connections of those who live in the same household during confinement, creating a personal routine which includes a space for contemplation, a space for the practice of beliefs which favor faith and hope<sup>(20,21)</sup>. Full attention, or mindfulness, is another contemplative practice which is quite extended and which can be a first resource to foster self-care; it is an integrative practice of spirituality towards introspection<sup>(22)</sup>. It becomes opportune to identify that another type of intervention in Nursing is empathy and active listening, where home care would contribute to healthy relationships, from the understanding of the other's critical moments, and where empathizing means contemplating the others to understand their care needs.

Where taking caring of themselves, human beings are capable of valuing the proper meaning of caring for the other. It can be translated as empathy, including the relationships with oneself, with the others, and with what is considered divine<sup>(23)</sup>. Spiritual care in the promotion of mental health by Nursing is essential. Although the struggle by some nurses takes place in the hospitals, others must contemplate home care and the promotion of the spiritual growth of human beings, product of self-care in this difficult period.

Nursing can intervene in the promotion of the mental health of the individuals in isolation, particularly from self-care strategies which favor the contemplative spirituality of the being. When the being understands itself in the way of care, it contemplates the other as a mirror and values its most essential moments. In contrast, disinterest is not a type of care but a constriction which would seem to leave the other locked; for this reason, superficial care actions are not a way of being in presence, but contribute to it.

Spirituality is an area of the human being that has always been there but which, in this moment, allows people in their confinement the practice of contemplation at a more essential level. The aforementioned allows people to face the complex situation of isolation and also finding themselves, helping in their development and in their search for the meaning of life.

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