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Qualitative research in pandemic times

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INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research allows the understanding of singular realities that are difficult to understand from a single prism, assuming itself more and more as an inter and transdisciplinary field[1-2], with specific methods and techniques that imply the relationship between researcher and participants for collection, analysis and validation of transcripts and analysis carried out by a researcher.

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic introduced clear limitations to the investigation, as it made it difficult to go to the field, decreased the possibility of incursions in research contexts, especially in health services, affecting the use of techniques that use the word, the look and empathy[3]. Many studies have been suspended and/or activities have been reorganized, due to COVID-19's own contingency plans; if, on the one hand, the pandemic hindered research, on the other, it fostered researchers' creativity to respond to new challenges.

New technologies have emerged as an instrument to support qualitative research, allowing the maintenance of communication and collaboration networks between researchers, professionals and participants, placing research once again at the service of collective health from the point of view of process (transfer) and content (knowledge)[4].

We believe that these changes, possible in the face of global circumstances, raise some questions that need extensive discussion, especially by "qualitative researchers". Undoubtedly, participant observation and ethnographic techniques cannot be done online and imply the real and not virtual presence of a researcher. However, the focus groups, the nominal group, the interviews and the conversation circles were possible with the use of interactive platforms that allow visual contact and recording, but that put the researcher away from the context where the phenomenon occurs and with limited viewing of participants.

The existence of an interface makes it difficult to build a relationship of trust and empathy. There are important non-verbal elements that are not fully identified, be it in attitude, gesture and context. They are not reached in depth, in their entirety, without face-to-face communication, as noted by Minayo and Costa. Each interview expresses in a different way the light and shadows of reality, so when analyzed, it needs to incorporate the context and, whenever possible, be accompanied and complemented by information from the observation of the setting under study[3].

The 'non-presence' also places limitations on analysis and interpretation of the findings, even with the burden of personal reflection and the use of creativity, implying real and in-depth knowledge of the context[3]. These issues, in addition to being reported as limitations to the study, can influence and introduce bias to the results, which should be well considered.

Qualitative knowledge transfer to the contexts of clinical practice was affected, not only by the barriers that make it difficult for health and management professionals to make decisions based on the most relevant

research results[2], but because it emphasized the privilege over linear and unidirectional models, to passively convey scientific information to users and consumers[2], due to the limitations imposed to presence in the context, reducing the possibility of more participatory research with the return of results to the context.

Considering this reflection, it is considered that the pandemic changed qualitative research from the study design to the introduction of results in the clinic, increased the intersubjectivity associated with qualitative research, introduced changes to methods and techniques that can affect the results, returning to privilege the model lines of knowledge transfer[2], with consequences in evidence-based practice. The discussion on these aspects is urgent to guarantee validity of results and safe use of qualitative evidence.

It is this sense of reflection and questioning that motivates us to gather in this edition some articles from the Ibero-American Congress on Qualitative Research (CIAIQ), held online in 2020, due to the current pandemic. This is a challenging condition for researchers who essentially seek to overcome the limits of reality in the search for meanings imposed in this scenario.

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