



BENEFÍCIOS DA TERAPIA LÚDICA NO TRATAMENTO DO CÂNCER INFANTIL - UMA REVISÃO

Benefits of playful therapy in child cancer treatment- the review

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Abstract: Playful therapy is a practice that is not widespread in several countries, which reminds us of the need to expose these strategies and their results as means of encouraging their establishment in the units and centers for the care of children with cancer. The aim of this study is to identify the benefits of using playful therapy as a form of adjunctive treatment for childhood cancer. A bibliographic review was carried out using the databases BIREME, LILACS, SciELO, PubMed and VHL, in publications between 2007 and 2018, as well as literary works that refer to this theme, published between 1975 and 2017, written or translated into Portuguese and English. The literature review allowed the understanding that playing is a primordial process in child development. The act of playing is a human need that helps the creation of concepts, assimilation of social roles, understanding of affective relationships, among others. Through playing, the child can expose her feelings, preferences, fears and habits, developing unknown or unpleasant experiences, which allows the generation of experiences. Thus, this study allowed the understanding of the benefits related to the use of playful therapy in the treatment of childhood cancer: greater adherence to treatment by children, establishment of better conditions in the hospital environment, increased affective activity and strengthening of child interaction with the health professional.

Keywords: Therapeutics; Playful Therapy; Neoplasms. Child.

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Resumo: A terapia lúdica constitui-se como prática pouco difundida em diversos países, o que nos remete à necessidade de exposição dessas estratégias e de seus resultados como meio de incentivo a sua instalação nas unidades e centros de atendimento a crianças com câncer. O objetivo deste estudo é identificar os benefícios da utilização da terapia lúdica como forma de tratamento adjuvante do câncer infantil. Foi realizada uma revisão bibliográfica utilizando as bases de dados BIREME, LILACS, SciELO, PubMed e BVS, em publicações entre 2007 e 2018, bem como obras literárias que se referem à presente temática, publicadas entre 1975 e 2017, redigidas ou traduzidas em língua portuguesa e inglesa. O levantamento bibliográfico permitiu identificar que o brincar é um processo primordial no desenvolvimento infantil. O ato de brincar é uma necessidade humana que possibilita a criação de conceitos, assimilação de papéis sociais, compreensão de relações afetivas, dentre outros. Através da brincadeira, a criança pode expor seus sentimentos, preferências, receios e hábitos, elaborando experiências desconhecidas ou desagradáveis, o que propicia a geração de experiências. Desse modo, este estudo permitiu identificar que os benefícios gerados pela utilização da terapia lúdica no tratamento do câncer infantil são: maior adesão ao tratamento por parte das crianças, estabelecimento de melhores condições no ambiente hospitalar, aumento da atividade afetiva e fortalecimento da interação da criança com o profissional de saúde.

Palavras-chave: Terapêutica; Ludoterapia; Neoplasias; Criança.

INTRODUCTION

Cancer is one of the public health problems of higher complexity that the Brazilian health system faces due to its epidemiological, social and economic amplitude. It is pointed out as the main cause of death in the population group from one to 19 years of age¹.

The childhood cancer is classified in the group of diseases which have as their common characteristics the disorderly growth of abnormal cells that affect the proper functioning of the organism, having variable causes, internal or external.²

The child affected by cancer faces intense suffering and are imposed to her expectations that change her life and, due to fears and myths around the oncological disease, are manifested expressions of shame and regret.³ After the diagnosis, she must deal with the uncertainty in relation to the future, with limited activities, will have to be subjected to invasive treatments and even parents tend to be super-protective.⁴ The child tends also to promote the perception of pain in response to the cancer diagnosis, pain is related to various situations, such as: in relation to the physical alteration,

treatment, lost bonds, breaking up with friends, longing pain.⁵

The sick child, before this type of diagnosis, feels difficulty understanding what is going on with her, both in relation to the disease itself, as in relation to the diagnostic and therapeutic procedures to which she is subjected. Souza *et al.*⁶ state that, due to what was explained above, an effective strategy to help the child to relieve the tensions and reduce anxiety is the use of playfulness.

Playing is a vital process in child development. The act of playing is a human need that helps the creation of concepts, assimilation of social roles, understanding of affective relationships, among others. Through playing, the child can expose her feelings, preferences, fears and habits, developing unknown or unpleasant experiences.

Playful therapy, although well known by health professionals, is a practice that is not widespread in several countries, including Brazil, which reminds us of the need to expose these strategies and their results as means of encouraging their establishment in the units and centers for the care of children with cancer.

Given the above, this study is a bibliographic review, whose aim is to highlight the benefits of the use of playful therapy as an adjuvant treatment

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of childhood cancer.

METHODOLOGY

A bibliographic review was carried out using the databases BIREME, LILACS, SciELO, PubMed and VHL, in publications between 2007 and 2018, as well as literary works that refer to this theme, published between 1975 and 2017, written or translated into Portuguese and English. It was opted for free search, without the use of controlled vocabulary. The descriptors used were selected by means of the list of Descriptors in Health Sciences (Decs) and included: *Playful therapy, treatment of childhood cancer, therapeutic toys, adjuvant treatment of childhood cancer, neoplasias and childhood cancer*. 142 publications on the subject were found. Of these, 20 were used in the study after being subjected to specific screening, in which they were taxed as useful original articles, with experimental or observational study performed with children in oncological treatment. Review articles were excluded.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A playful activity and the childhood cancer

The child is a being in the process of development that is vulnerable to environmental factors, they may advance or retard the process. Toy is a great potentiating strategy of child development, allowing a great emotional expression, in addition to improving the processes of socialization, language and psychomotricity^{8,9}. Through playing, the children develop various skills that help in the understanding of the world and their situation within it.¹⁰

Although cancer causes physical restrictions in children, they bestow little meaning to these limits and seek to maintain their life as close to reality as possible, enjoying all the possible scenarios to be transformed into places of entertainment to practice games and jokes. This requires health professionals a greater vision about the services provided, which must not be intended only for the treatment of

diseases, but they should be directed to the holistic hosting of the individual.¹¹

Playfulness is an instrument capable of making cancer treatment less traumatic and generate link between the professional and the child, decreasing fear and insecurity. The children see the professional differently, converting the image of someone who invades their privacy for someone who cares for playing. Families feel included and strengthened during the hospitalization period, which is extremely important, because the emotional distress of caretakers interferes directly in the children's emotional situation with cancer.¹²

The playful activity must be institutionalised and always associated to psychological care, since there is a high rate of children who need this type of care. The data of studies show that the playful therapy eases the difficulties arising from cancer, especially to relatives and companions. The children hospitalized for cancer treatment have behavioral problems, such as fear, feeding difficulty and difficulty sleeping.¹³

The playfulness is also a humanized way available to health care team to allow the child to deal better with stressful experiences, increasing the field of perception and

providing escape from the experienced daily reality. With this, the child acquires subsidy for the absorption of new knowledge, understanding what is happening in the hospital environment and clarifying misconceptions that hinder the adherence to therapy.¹⁴

According to Hostert, Enumo and Loss¹³ (2014), through the application of a computerized instrument for Assessment of Playing (ABHcomp), the playful activities preferred by hospitalized children are watch television, draw, listen to stories, play instruments and play with clowns; while the least chosen are play with puppets, play ball and play doctor. These preferences are based, mainly, in the hospital context, which requires more tranquil games, with little space, and in virtue of the children's locomotion, who, on several occasions, is jeopardized.

Benefits of playful activities

Through the application of playful activities, especially the design, it is possible to verify that they work as tools that assist in the perception of the experiences and understanding of the feelings of children with cancer during treatment. Upon submitting specific traits, drawings can be analyzed by

trained professionals and allow to identify the peculiarities of each individual in the process of cancer treatment, such as feelings of insecurity, conflict, tension, fear or defensive sensitivity.¹⁵

In addition, the design also features therapeutic character, since it allows children to alleviate and unload tensions, in addition to strengthening the process of reworking of the experiences of illness. The games and the graphical representations allow the individual the relief of feelings of anguish, expansion of cognitive development and, therefore, higher possibility of adherence to the treatment.¹⁵

Scientific evidence of the benefits of playful intervention

Motta; Enumo¹⁶ (2010), by means of psychological analysis using the computerised instrument for assessment the Coping with the hospitalization (AEHcomp), studied 12 children with cancer, aged between 7 and 12 years old, hospitalized in a public hospital of the city of Vitória, in Espírito Santo. Through a program of

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playful psychological intervention, children were subjected to daily sessions of recreational activities such as drawing, painting, games and puppets theater.

Through the program, the researchers identified a lower resistance to illness and hospitalization for children, with a decrease of behaviors that evoked psychological stress and reduced adherence to treatment. They also observed, that the playful strategy minimized the negative effects of exposure to invasive procedures and pain, in addition to causing changes in the thoughts and feelings of these patients. In this sense, the playful therapy was important for the promotion of well-being during hospitalization and treatment of childhood cancer.¹⁶

Researchers, through observation and interview with children in chemotherapy treatment at Hospital Infantil Darcy Vargas, concluded that children in use of therapeutic toy had more relaxed posture during the session of playful activities and remained so after its completion. In addition, it was possible to identify that the use of therapeutic toys is capable of promoting

greater interaction between adult and child, making the procedures less daunting and permanence in the clinic more enjoyable and relaxing.¹⁷

Pedrosa *et al.*¹⁸ (2007) upon transforming a stroller dressings of Pediatric Oncology Unit of the Instituto Materno Infantil Prof. Fernando Figueira (IMIP) in a carrier of toys, provided fun and relaxation in children hospitalized due to cancer. The materials used were books, toys, paper and color pencils, collected through donations.

The researchers, through the daily playful intervention performed in the Imip infirmary, identified improvement in the hospital environment, which began to be more enjoyable for children and for the caretakers. In addition, the games allowed the children the development of skills and return of confidence, in addition to demystifying the dread of hospital routine and help them resolve conflicts and deal with them more naturally.¹⁸

Mussa; Korn Malerbi¹⁹ (2017), researchers from São Paulo, evaluated 15 children hospitalized for treatment of cancer in Santa Casa de Misericórdia. The researchers analyzed the children by means of a behavior script, unidimensional scale of pain and

interview. The playful activities evaluated were practiced by storytellers and included reading books, games and drawing paintings.

After the completion of the sessions of playful activities, ten children showed improvement in emotional state, becoming more cheerful. For some children, who before the activities had become agitated or were crying, the visit of storytellers was useful to calm them. The others, who were already previously calm or happy, remained well after the end of the games. The results were positive for both sexes and showed no discrepancy in relation to the children's age. After the visit, seven of the 15 children have increased their interaction with their companion or with other children also admitted. Furthermore, the parents reported that they were more attached, more affectionate, more thoughtful or more cheerful after insertion of ludic therapy.¹⁹

Araújo; Guimarães²⁰ (2009) conducted interviews with patients and caretakers of the Pediatric Onco-Hematology ward of the Support Hospital of Brasilia city on the performance of "Clowns-doctors", playful therapy already used at the hospital.

Children with cancer who were

interviewed, regardless of age, reported great satisfaction with the presence of "Clowns-doctors" at the hospital, stating that they felt "good", "happy" or "joyful". They were also able to describe a reduction of unpleasant physical sensations and decrease the desire to cry to participate in the proposed recreational activities. They also evidenced, that the activity allowed the distraction when exposed to adverse situations of hospitalization or to painful medical procedures. The interviewed caretakers reported that the playful activities were beneficial to patients because they are a stimulating and distracting strategy, since it allowed the child to be in a more natural environment.²¹

The benefits are also experienced by professionals, who upon exercising care with playful strategies, feel gratified and happy, because they have their work recognized by children and families, making the process of happiness mutual among all those involved in the treatment of childhood cancer.¹² This strengthens the professional satisfaction and encourages the institutionalization of playfulness as a strategy of adjuvant treatment.

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It has been demonstrated that the playful resources can also serve as important sources of data collection. Although the child has the ability to express her feelings and emotions, many have difficulty at the time of deciding, requiring that the professionals penetrate into the child's world through games and jokes.^{13,21} This ratifies the need of introducing playful therapy since the first contact with the child patient

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Thus, this study allowed the understanding of the benefits related to the use of playful therapy in the treatment of childhood cancer: greater adherence to treatment by children, establishment of better conditions in the hospital environment, increased affective activity and strengthening of child interaction with the health professional. Therefore, it is something that must be instituted within the oncology care centers, since it can lead to higher rates of cure of childhood cancer, besides promoting the childhood valuation and redeem the principles of

humane treatment.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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