Performance in Pediatric Oncology and Music as a Health Promoter: Meanings for Professionals

Objective: To understand how professionals feel about working in pediatric oncology and using music as a health promoter in the hospital environment. Method: A descriptive, exploratory, and qualitative study, based on the theoretical assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism, carried out with 10 professionals in the pediatric oncology sector of the largest regional children’s hospital in Western Santa Catarina. Data collection took place through a semi-structured interview with each professional. The data were analyzed according to content analysis, directed to each category. Results: Working in pediatric oncology has shown to demand dedication from professionals, in addition to creating a bond of trust and support between the care team members, the hospitalized individuals, and their family members. It is a sector with possibilities to promote health through comfort, guidance, and several actions that provide distraction, such as music. Conclusion: Acting in oncology pediatrics is rewarding and offers constant learning. Furthermore, the music turns out to be an instrument to promote health in the sector, as it allows relaxation, distraction, reflections, hope, and encouragement for listeners and enables humanization in health care in the hospital environment.

Descriptors: Oncology; Health professionals; Health promotion; Music.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Comprender el significado para los profesionales en el trabajo en oncología pediátrica y en el uso de la música como promotora de salud en el ámbito hospitalario. Método: Estudio descriptivo, exploratorio con abordaje cualitativo, basado en los supuestos teóricos del interaccionismo simbólico, realizado con 10 profesionales del sector de oncología pediátrica del mayor hospital regional infantil delOccidente de Santa Catarina. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de una entrevista semiestructurada con cada profesional. Los datos fueron analizados según el análisis de contenido, dirigido a la categoría temática. Resultados: Trabajar en oncología pediátrica ha demostrado exigir dedicación de los profesionales, además de formar un vínculo para tener confianza y apoyo entre el equipo de atención, las personas hospitalizadas y los familiares. Es un sector con posibilidades de promover salud a través del confort, la orientación y las diversas acciones que brindan distracción, como la música. Conclusión: Actuar en pediatria oncológica es gratificante, con aprendizaje constante, y la música es un instrumento para promover salud en el sector, ya que permite la relajación, la distracción, la reflexión, la esperanza y el estímulo para quienes la escuchan, posibilitando la humanización en el cuidado de la salud en el entorno hospitalario.

Descriptors: Oncología; Profesionales de la salud; Promoción de la salud; Música.
INTRODUCTION

Cancer belongs to a set of diseases that cause the uncontrollable development of abnormal cells, spreading anywhere in the human organism. It has a high incidence, and it is the leading cause of death among children and adolescents, from one to 19 years old\(^1\). The types of cancer that usually affect these people affect the blood system and support tissue, with leukemia and lymphoma as the most common, followed by brain tumors and other types that affect the central nervous system\(^2\).

Most treatments start late due to late diagnosis or other variables that hinder the early screening of the disease such as difficulty in accessing services and technologies\(^3\). During the diagnosis and subsequent treatment, hospitalization for children begins, requiring recurrent and sometimes prolonged hospitalizations in the pediatric oncology unit.

The care offered by health professionals to children undergoing cancer treatment becomes differentiated care as procedures and situations need to be evaluated and developed with greater caution and delicacy. They are vulnerable as a result of the new health condition and all the changes that the disease causes\(^4\). Also, we need to understand that the hospitalization process and the treatment restructure children's lives and routines, taking them away from their families, home, school, toys, and freedom outside the hospital. There are also side effects of medications that cause nausea, tiredness, lack of appetite, among others\(^3\).

The approach and the bond between professionals and children in the oncology sector require strategies that involve games, fun, and playfulness so that there is a relationship of trust and the work is developed without stress for both sides\(^4\). The use of playfulness becomes an important tool to reduce the negative effects of hospitalization, which enhances the adaptation of individuals to the hospital environment, favoring relaxation, a more pleasant and joyful place\(^3\), promoting health in the environment hospital.

The Ottawa Charter brings one of the first broad concepts of health promotion, considering it as the process of empowering individuals and communities to improve their quality of life. Health is seen as a positive concept, presenting five fields of action for health promotion: healthy public policies, favorable environments for health, community action, personal skills, and reorientation of health services\(^5\). In the hospital environment, music is one of the strategies to promote health. Music has been revealed as a relevant technology of Nursing care for covering the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual individual, providing moments of tranquility, comfort and leisure, facilitating means of communication between professionals and hospitalized individuals\(^7\)\(^8\).

The music in the hospital environment used as a playful tool and health promotion offers feelings of tranquility, peace, and relaxation to hospitalized children, enabling their awareness of the lyrics and sounds emitted, through the songs. It also allows children to travel through their imagination, developing their creativity, and helping them to escape their fears\(^9\).

However, there are still weaknesses regarding scientific evidence in the act of promoting health in the hospital environment. In this scenario, professors and students of a Nursing undergraduate course from a public university in southern Brazil, when evidencing few playful activities in the pediatric hospital, decided to organize an extension program aimed at promoting playful moments to hospitalized individuals through music. Thus, in 2018, the Music extension program was born.

The extension program involves weekly musical intervention for children and their families/caregivers and professionals working in the oncology sector. Based on the successful results, the program team organized a research project to strengthen scientific evidence on the use of music and its benefits for promoting health in the hospital environment, in search of humanized and comprehensive assistance. From then on, the guiding question of the study emerged: What are the meanings of working in pediatric oncology and using music as a health promoter in the hospital environment?

During the hospitalization process, a bond is established in health care between professionals, children, and their families, relevant to consider the meanings that emerge in this relational interaction. Therefore, we decided to support this study to the theoretical assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism, as the professional assisting a hospitalized child establishes affective and symbolic interactions, being a social phenomenon. From symbolic action, individuals create and use symbols to interact with the world, and without these symbols, it would not be possible to relate to other people\(^10\). Thus, the study aimed to understand the meanings of working in pediatric
oncology and the use of music as a health promoter in the hospital environment.

METHOD

This is a descriptive, exploratory study with a qualitative approach, based on the theoretical assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism initially thought by George Herbert Mead, a classical sociologist and later described by Herbert Blumer, who points out the relationship of meanings certain actions, the interactions of individuals, groups, and languages[6].

This study comes from a matrix research project from a public university in Southern Brazil. It has the participation of 10 professionals who worked in the oncology sector, from the largest public pediatric hospital in Western Santa Catarina. The inclusion criterion considered the professionals who worked in the pediatric oncology sector and who had already participated in the musical intervention of the Music extension program in the hospital environment. The exclusion criteria considered the professionals who were on leave and had worked in pediatric oncology for less than two months.

This musical intervention is carried out weekly, in the pediatric hospital. In which six students and two professors of the Nursing area voluntarily sing with a guitar and violin for the hospitalized children, their relatives, and professionals of the oncology sector. The musical repertoire involves lyrics that deal with themes about love, family, friendship, life, and hope. With the proper authorization of hospitalized children and their families, the group enters the rooms and performs musical intervention, choosing songs, according to the needs of each one, promoting health in the hospital environment.

To understand the meanings of working in pediatric oncology and the use of music to promote health, we used a semi-structured interview as data collection, with the support of a script of semi-structured questions, involving several themes: work in the oncology sector, the experiences inside and outside the hospital, understanding of the health-disease process, possibilities for health promotion in the hospital, the meanings of using music as a tool to promote health and the sensations aroused by the musical intervention.

Data collection was performed in the second half of 2019, after the musical intervention at the hospital. The interview was conducted in a reserved place of the hospital only with the professional and the researcher, according to the choice of the participant. At the beginning of the interview, the Informed Consent Term (ICF) was presented, and only after its signature and agreement, the interviews were carried out and recorded using a smartphone.

For the analysis and interpretation of data, we used content analysis in the thematic mode, proposed by Minayo[11]. In this modality, we work with the frequency of a determined object analyzed, presenting steps such as pre-analysis. It includes a fluctuating reading, identifying the lines, then the data coding, bringing units of meaning, the thematic analysis, and finally, a categorization to meet the objective of the study.

We used the name of trees to name the participants for their anonymity. This was a symbolism meaning that, in the assistance provided in the oncology sector, the professionals are related to the children and their families as roots of the tree. Since then, such a relationship has been strengthened and grown through the constant hospitalization of children, as the stem of the tree, which grows, emerging the leaves and fruits, through the bond that is built in this interaction. The research respected the ethical aspects according to Resolution 466/2012 and started only after approval by the Research Ethics Committee, under the opinion of 3,324,427.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ten professionals from the pediatric oncology sector participated in the study aged between 23 and 56 years old, eight were female and two were male. The participants were from different professions: five Nursing technicians, two nurses, a doctor, a psychologist, and a parlormaid. The time in the sector varied from five to 24 months.

After analyzing and exploring the data, three categories were listed: 1) Meanings of work in pediatric oncology; 2) Possibilities to promote the health of children and their families in the hospital; 3) Meanings of music in the hospital.

Meanings of work in pediatric oncology

Oncology has different aspects from other hospital units. In pediatric oncology, holistic care is intensified because, in addition to assisting children in the hospitalization process, it is also necessary to take care of their families and witness delicate situations[4]. In this sense, there are several reactions, ways, and meanings that interfere with how professionals deal with work in
this environment. For some, the oncology sector has repercussions on the meaning of an interesting place of activity, providing satisfaction, being gratifying for presenting positive results in assistance and feedback from hospitalized individuals and their families\(^{(12)}\), as pointed out:

“[...] it’s very good.” (Cherry tree)

“It is very gratifying because we see their affection (children and family). So, their thanks make it worthwhile and make us think that we are going the right way.” (Orange)

The satisfaction of acting in something the professional appreciates gives personal fulfillment and pleasure in developing such activities, which contributes to positive results and the well-being of the team, hospitalized individuals, and family members\(^{(13)}\). This is important, especially in pediatric oncology, where professionals understand the need to act with sensitivity, commitment, and responsibility in health care:

“To work in pediatric oncology, you need to have love, passion for what you do and also commitment [...]” (Pau-Brasil)

Comprehensive care for hospitalized children goes beyond techniques, requiring professionals to have a peculiar view, which includes them as active subjects in the care process, strengthening and facilitating communication and relationships between professional-hospitalized-family members\(^{(14)}\). From this bond, the professional will understand the particularities, needs, and desires of everyone who needs care, developing strategies, and actions that will contribute to the entire hospitalization process\(^{(15)}\).

Some of the activities carried out in the assistance are educational activities, involving guidelines to provide a period of hospitalization with better quality in which the professional also realizes the need to be prepared for it\(^{(16)}\), as evidenced by the study participants:

“We need to show confidence, affection, love for children and also discipline because they (children and family) have to understand that, unfortunately, they are undergoing treatment and need to proceed very well.” (Olive)

“In oncology, you have to work hard, because you need to explain everything, what medication you did, what it is for, when another medication will return, it is always good to explain it very well, all actions have to be well oriented.” (Araucaria)

Acting in oncology is also something challenging because it awakens meanings, emerging feelings that shake the psychological of professionals who develop empathy by being in the place of those children and family:

“It is difficult because every day we face the suffering of children and parents (...) our psychological, sometimes, is very shaken because we put in their place.” (Ipe)

“[...] I, as a mother, sometimes put myself in their place. It is difficult [...] we have to work a lot on the emotional, in my case, I am the mother of a 5-year-old child, an age group with many hospitalizations here.” (Cherry tree)

“In the beginning, it was not very easy... I remembered my mother who had cancer, who passed away, it was very complicated in the beginning.” (Cedro)

“[...] sometimes we are in situations on the emotional side, that we have to be insured and stay focused and be strong [...]” (Lemon tree)

Professionals deal with situations during the hospitalization process by following the entire sequence of care delivery, observing moments of suffering, anguish, uncertainty. The hospital experience for professionals can generate feelings, whether of suffering, joy, apprehension, hope, emerging personal and emotional meanings\(^{(17)}\). In this sense, many of them reported to have a mixture of feelings, sometimes happy and, at another time, showing sadness:

“[...] we get attached to the children and end up suffering together, being happy together, it's all a mixture of feelings.” (Lemon Tree)

“[...] we get attached, we suffer together and rejoice together [...] there are certain things that happen to children that we don’t understand because we expect them to have a lifetime to live, isn’t it?” (Araucaria)

“It is a mix of feelings because we have to take care, but at the same time we end up getting attached.” (Ipe)

“[...] we see the affection of the children, they get attached to us, and we get attached to them [...]” (Pau-Brasil)

Professionals may find situations in which they are unable to deal with feelings, needing psychological support or working in a team to cope feelings, venting and sharing sadness and satisfaction, which contributes to the strengthening of interactions between the team and professional life relationships\(^{(17-18)}\). However, in addition to the relationship with children, professionals also deal with communication with family members. Professionals must bond with family members, involving care, assisting them in
a humanized, welcoming way, which generates trust, contributing to the recovery of the hospitalized individual\textsuperscript{[15]}:

“[..] we have to be strong for us, we have to be strong for family members and we also have to be strong for the children.” (Pau-Brasil)

“[..] we don’t just take care of the patient, we sometimes take care of more than one family member, because sometimes it is a new diagnosis, we have children who are hospitalized to investigate and end up closing the report, we have the support from psychologists, nutritionists, but the greatest contact is with Nursing, so, whatever little thing they give, they call the Nursing staff [...]” (Jacaranda)

Nursing is extremely important in health care for hospitalized individuals. The nurse has a closer relationship in care, either with the individual in its entirety or with his family members who usually trust and bond with the Nursing professionals. Some of the activities that are well performed in Nursing and become the profession’s potential are the creation and maintenance of the bond with individuals and their families, the facilitator of health care, having good communication with those involved, leadership, and teamwork\textsuperscript{[19]}.

When caring for hospitalized children and their family members, the professional means this assistance with the symbolism of being strong in dealing with situations involving pediatric oncology, also referring to the feeling of empathy, when putting themselves in the place of children and family members in cancer treatment. Therefore, it means that this care is related to the social interactions that are established during hospitalization. According to Symbolic Interactionism, it is from the process of interaction that individuals form meanings and act concerning other people and the things that surround them\textsuperscript{[10]}.

Thus, the need for a continuous process of training and experiences is evident, so that professionals can improve care assistance, whether in manual techniques and communication with hospitalized individuals, family members, and staff\textsuperscript{[16,18]}. The actions that can promote health in this environment highlights the ways of providing care and health broadly.

**Possibilities to promote the health of children and their families in the hospital**

Health promotion is a tool to improve the quality of life of hospitalized individuals, aiming at comprehensive care, considering their way of life and culture. Thus, promoting health in the hospital area is extremely important since the hospitalization process is an abrupt change, even more for children, as it changes their routine, their friendly relationships, and their leisure space\textsuperscript{[9]}.

From this perspective, it is of great relevance when the multi-professional team, especially the Nursing team, seeks to integrate care by welcoming the hospitalized individual and the family, creating a bond to obtain trust and facilitating the effectiveness of health care, and also, through listening and attention, they can guide and assist in improving the hospitalization process\textsuperscript{[3]}:

“Through our work, we can promote health because generally we already come with only the treatment, the care itself, right? So, normally the children who are here are because they already have a disease, some disease, something, so we can also guide, advise family members.” (Pau-Brasil)

“[..] encouraging, helping whenever I can and guiding children and their families to have a better life here at the hospital.” (Jacaranda)

Family members also suffer from the disease and the hospitalization process because, with the health problem, there is the emotional impact, fears, and anxieties, also, to wear and mental imbalance\textsuperscript{[20]}. This whole context requires professionals to offer support so that they can promote a healthy and less traumatic environment, both for the hospitalized individual and for their family, for the social interaction process established during hospitalization:

“I think it is important to support and guide the children and always talk to the mother and/or father who take care of them.” (Lemon Tree)

“It is also important to give confidence to the mother... The mother needs to be safe to give security to the child.” (Cherry tree)

When rescuing the assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism, it is evident that when caring for the child undergoing cancer treatment and his family, the professional build meanings in this interaction. From these interactions and the events of life, during cancer treatment, the meanings and the behavioral process of the mind emerge, creating a space for the self to develop and form symbols that are absorbed and internalized in the self of each human being\textsuperscript{[20]}. Thus, professionals start to take care of children and their families, according to their established
needs, during the act of caring, seeking to guide them in a relationship of trust and security.

Also, in addition to medication and assistance, comfort is one of the forms of Nursing care that must be applied during the hospitalization process, considering that the child and the caregivers suffer from continuous and intensive treatment(23):

“Offering what is possible here in the hospital for the comfort of the children and their parents... even offering an extra blanket, trying to see in the kitchen another food that the child likes and can eat... they are small ways of care, but can bring more comfort.” (Cherry tree)

When caring for children in the health service, we need to observe the individuality of each one to respect their biopsychosocial development(21). To this end, we suggest to use playfulness and interaction, which help the child in reducing the stress caused by the treatment, bringing them closer to the professional, decreasing fear, and also making the workplace more pleasant(23):

“Having a lot of dynamics, interactive activities, not putting children and families in just one room and treating them with medication, I think they have to have psychological treatment for them too.” (Pau-Brasil)

“With affection, with love, with hugs [...]” (Cedro)

The use of playing as a way of presentation to the hospitalized child is significant, but its use during the practice of care, adapting the technical part causes greater spontaneity(22). In the ludic environment, the use of music is also inserted, which helps in reducing tension and anxiety, providing intellectual stimuli, among other benefits. Also, the application of music according to the preference of the hospitalized individual leads to fun and a smile, improving the comfort of care(23).

The professionals, especially the Nursing team, understand the need for comprehensive care and the biomedical model, which contributes not only to the search for the cure of the disease, but that brings the quality of life to those who are in this hospitalization process and their caregivers. Therefore, they seek support in activities that can provide greater quality and meaning during the hospitalization period, using technologies to promote health, such as the use of music.

**Meanings of music in the hospital**

In pediatric oncology, children are subjected to changes in their daily lives, which increases their vulnerability since they are removed from their social group and restricted to be isolated in their bed, part of the time(20). Given these changes, there must be a healthy relationship between the professional and the hospitalized child and quality of care, which advocates being humanized and empathic care, respecting their limitations and feelings in a welcoming environment, in search of development healthy.

Thus, the environment is considered to influence recovery. In this respect, music emerges as a possibility to promote health in the hospital environment, as it influences the process of setting, helping to maintain the mental health of those who need care and professionals. As a complementary activity, there are feelings of happiness, relaxation, relaxation, and lightness (24), as pointed out by the study participants:

“ [...] the music brings us comfort and animation to follow the shift because it makes the environment lighter.” (Cherry tree)

“It’s a nice moment, that people get a little distracted.” (Araucaria)

“ [...] it is a moment that we can distract, forget a little about all the hospital routine, we can relax. And also, for the children and family, because you can see that they are very happy when the music groups arrive.” (Cedar).

The choice of musical repertoire is relevant and significant, as hospitalization is a moment of vulnerability, both for children and their families. The songs with messages of hope and positivity are satisfactory choices, considering the mood and disposition of the child and his family so that the lyrics and melody are appropriate for the moment they are experiencing(25), as we observed in the Orange tree and Ipe reports:

“The songs have beautiful lyrics, which make us reflect.” (Orange tree)

“You play very good music and it brings a lot of meaning and important feeling, which sometimes fits exactly the moment that the person is going through and brings hope to move on.” (Ipe)

The professionals also addressed that music triggers happiness, encouragement, comfort, and leisure for children and them too:

“Music brings animation to the children, more happiness [...] a greater stimulus, it shows that the child is active and rejoices and it is good that it makes us happy too.” (Olive tree)
“Music brings leisure here at the hospital and children like it very much... it is very important for children in oncology and for us too.” (Rubber tree)

“When music arrives here at the hospital, it brings comfort to us and those who are hospitalized.” (Ipe)

As the hospitalization process is related to unpleasant feelings and under intense tension, both professionals and hospitalized individuals and family members are burdened with negative meanings, involved in a mixture of feelings and insecurity, which can bring discouragement. Because of this, it is important to implement activities that help harmonize the place, promoting leisure, with moments of happiness and relaxation since the environment is a major influencer in recovery and the good performance of work.

Music is considered a playful instrument relevant to the development of the child, both in speech and in the construction of his personality, in addition to significantly interfering with his emotional and everyone around him, bringing different feelings. For the study participants, music gives rise to meanings that help in promoting the health of hospitalized children and also the professionals who work in the place:

“I think it is a special moment, both for those who are working here and for those who are hospitalized [...] these different activities also provide them with a better, more energizing moment.” (Cherry tree)

“Sometimes it makes you want to cry depending on the moment, the situation like this, smiling, singing along with playing, several feelings [...]” (Jacaranda)

“Music helps to promote health because it makes everyone happy here and sometimes, they are in a sad moment, they are there quietly, and with music we are happy, the children laugh, they want to sing, I think all of this promotes health, the child is happy, and health improves.” (Orange tree)

“Music releases the hormones of happiness, works better, circulates blood better, children are more excited, it is a help that Nursing has to assess how the child is doing [...]” (Lemon tree).

Music is present in the lives of human beings and directly influences the mood fluctuation and predisposition to perform tasks, considering that it is related to the biological, emotional, spiritual, and mental dimensions of each individual. Because of this, when well used, it can assist in the promotion and recovery of the health of the hospitalized individual, motivating, and contributing to the improvement of professional practices.

However, music does not only act to promote the health of hospitalized individuals. It also generates joy, relaxation, and relief from the workload in health care, especially for professionals working in pediatric oncology:

“Music gives us joy, it gives us energy.” (Olive tree)

“Joy, you know, because sometimes we are on a tense day, everything happens, we get sad, and the music cheers us up, gives us an up and hope.” (Lemon Tree)

From the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, professionals assisting children and their families are reflecting, feeling, relating, interacting, through the use of music and so many other strategies. It is a symbolic action. In this context, the use of music is a care technology that helps in the interactional process and promotes health since, in a delicate and significant way, it transforms energy and unpleasant emotions, through moments of hope and joy in the hospital environment.

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The hospitalization process stands out among the particularities of the treatment of childhood cancer. This means a change in the child’s routine, distancing from home, toys, and all life outside the hospital. For professionals, acting in the oncology sector means trust, continuous growth, learning, satisfaction, and reflection. However, during work, caring for children and their families awakens meanings that affect them, by sharing their experiences and sufferings, sometimes shaking them psychologically.

To make the hospitalization period smoother and better, professionals seek to develop an interactional process with children and their families, offering assistance playfully, with strategies to assist in humanized care such as music. Professionals working in pediatric oncology believe that music can be an instrument for promoting the health of children, families, and themselves.

Music brings meanings of closeness, bonding with the child and his family, renewing the energies of the hospital environment, resurgence of hope and happiness, contributing to alleviate the challenges of pediatric hospitalization. In this perspective, professionals,
especially Nursing need to seek possibilities to provide musical moments in the hospital environment, recognizing the meanings that music provides. In this study, the relevance of its use as a care technology contributed to the expansion of means to provide health care.

This research has repercussions on contributions regarding the meanings that involve care in the pediatric oncology sector as innovation when considering music as a health promotion instrument. The limitations of the study were the lack of opportunity to interview all categories of professionals working in the oncology sector since this place demands a multi-professional and committed team. As a continuity of the study, we suggest approaching the theme with different professionals working in the hospital. We also suggest to pediatric oncology to expand the scientific evidence and instigate other institutions and sectors, so that they recognize the significance of using music as a care technology and can also enjoy its benefits.

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