The experience of the ethics committee in research in human beings in times of pandemic COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2)

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.54448/mdnt21634
Received: 09-09-2021; Revised: 11-11-2021; Accepted: 12-09-2021; Published: 12-18-2021; MedNEXT-id: e21634

Introduction

In Brazil, research involving human beings is regulated by resolution 466/12 which replaced 196/96 and was published on June 13, 2013 in the Official Gazette of the Union [1]. Resolution 466/12 brings terms and conditions to be followed and deals with the CEP and / CONEP (National Commission for Research Ethics) System, which is a social control body linked to the Ministry of Health (MS) composing a system that uses the mechanisms, proper relationship tools and instruments aimed at protecting research participants [2].

However, since January 30, 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the infection by the new Coronavirus also called (2019-nCoV and SARS-CoV-2) as a global public health emergency, some modifications and/or adaptations had to be implemented by CONEP due to the pandemic that was only officially declared as such on March 11, 2020 due to the rapid geographic spread that Covid-19 had been showing [3].

The aim of this article is to report the experience of the IPO Hospital during the covid19 pandemic period (SARS-CoV-2).

Methods

Descriptive and documentary study, which uses the case study as a reference. In this process, the totality of projects filed in the CEP of Hospital IPO in the period between March 2020 and September 2021 directly linked to covid19 was dimensioned. To identify the research protocols related to Covid19, the information contained in the mandatory fields of all the cover pages of the CEP research protocols in this period was analyzed.
The CEP of Hospital IPO is currently composed of 9 (nine) members representing 7 areas of knowledge, and this number of protocols gives an average of 4.3 projects for each member only related to COVID-19. The number of projects not related to covid19 prepared by CEP in this period was 153 which is the average of CEP in the last 5 years, the percentage of increase in reporting due to covid19 was around 24%.

Reflection on the experience

At the last CEP meeting held on August 24, 2021, the CEP members made an assessment of how the activity has been in times of pandemic. In the evaluation of the coordinator, the deputy coordinator and the majority of members as changes undertaken by CONEP due to the severity and proportion that a pandemic has brought to Brazil and to the world, despite despite being considered strictly necessary and comprehensive, since the rapid spread and severity of the disease that has already led to the death of more than 580 thousand Brazilians, according to data published by the Johns Hopkins University [4] brought some difficulties such as:

1. The mandatory evaluation of projects within seven days;
2. The reorganization of CEP procedures, as well as the adequacy of all members for virtual meetings;
3. The need for extraordinary meetings;
4. The number of projects with the participation of other institutions and the vast majority with financial support from international companies, which brings more complex characteristics to research protocols and even need more time and rigor in the evaluation;
5. The need for daily updating of the procedures edited by CONEP;

In addition to those that are specific and directly linked to the performance of members in CEP, we can also highlight that the practical home office activity little known in Brazil also brought other concerns, such as people's difficulty in separating work from home and family activities. It is important to remember that in the first year of the pandemic, where social distancing was practically mandatory, it was not only the parents who remained at home, but the whole family, so each member had to strive to keep the focus on professional responsibilities, as well as, take care of the routine at home and, in many cases, also take care of their children's schooling [3].

Also, the lack of social interaction, excessive working hours, concerns about health, loss of employment and income, and the fear of being infected by the disease, were also mentioned as negative experiences. Emotional aspects such as anxiety, insomnia, irritability, among others, were also listed as negative points, especially after the loss of one of the oldest members of CEP who died in May this year. On the other hand, flexibility in time and not having to face the traffic while commuting are the positive points of the home office modality highlighted by the members [5,6].

Conclusions

The pandemic brought many lessons and in the field of education it was most of the time essential to maintain learning, but this type of online education brought to light or reaffirmed the great social inequalities that we live in the country. While a part of the population has adapted, despite some difficulty, to activities, some people have suffered and continue to suffer from the effects of this inequality. The technology, although it has grown a lot in recent years, according to experts, is still not accessible to all Brazilians. The internet, as well as other technologies necessary for technological education, is not universal in the country, which in practice contributes to a significant educational delay that should last for years in Brazil.

Keywords: Pandemic. Research Ethics. Public Health.

Acknowledgement
Nil.

Funding
Not applicable.

Data sharing statement
No additional data are available.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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