Federal council of nursing on the COVID-19 tour: digital communication in the light of habermasian theory

ABSTRACT | Objective: To analyze the articles published by the Federal Nursing Council during the COVID-19 pandemic in the light of the Habermasian communicative action theory. Method: Qualitative documentary study, carried out from May to July 2020, using pandemic news published by the municipality as the primary source. The material was organized through thematic content analysis and discussed based on the theory and related literature. Results: The council produced technical note materials as instruments to guide professionals and approved resolutions and regulations. The performance of the system was focused on the acquisition and distribution of protective equipment through regional offices, lawsuits, the creation of an observatory and an emotional support channel for professionals. Conclusion: Communication with awareness and knowledge to nursing professionals was prioritized, empowering them in work processes in the pandemic context. Keywords: Pandemics; Coronavirus; Health communication; Nursing; Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION
The year 2020 was strongly marked by the pandemic COVID-19, so that Brazil and other countries have faced a
crisis with serious consequences for human life, public health and the economy. Thus, preventive measures related to the new coronavirus, the causative agent of the disease, occurred late, considering that only on March 11th, 2020 did the World Health Organization (WHO) classify it as a pandemic disease.

At this juncture, COVID-19 became the most talked about subject in the news, in conversations between family members, friends and co-workers, and also in the speech of political representatives, and many of the information reported/ commented did not present veracity, compromising the results for a better outcome of this scenario.

Information is a necessary tool for people to be aware of the disease, its consequences and the appropriate measures to prevent contamination and its spread. In the area of health, information also represents power and sharing it in emergency situations such as outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics is essential for agencies and services to plan their actions based on this communication.

For health professionals, the challenges are even greater, because, in addition to all the demand involved and difficulties experienced in facing the pandemic, they must be constantly informed through the various means of communication, in order to provide qualified and free of damages resulting from negligence, recklessness or malpractice.

Among these professionals, the nursing category represents the largest contingent of workers in public and private services, being present in all Brazilian municipalities, levels of health care and organizational structures of the system. To this end, the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN) showed concern for nursing professionals in this context, using its website to disseminate various information to nursing professionals and civil society.

The internet is currently configured as an important Digital Information and Communication Technology, with countless data sources and possibilities for interactions between people, and, in the field of health, there is an increasing number of users and professionals looking for information in their everyday life, which can provide them with greater security and autonomy.

In view of these arguments, the Theory of Communicative Action (TAC), proposed by Jürgen Habermas, an exponent researcher of critical theory and considered one of the great thinkers of today, is contemplated. Thus, the question is: What is the communicative approach of the municipality directed to the category of nursing in relation to the pandemic? In this direction, the objective of this study was to analyze the articles published by COFEN during the pandemic COVID-19 in the light of TAC.

**METHOD**

This is a documentary study with a qualitative approach, with data collection carried out during the months of May to July 2020, through the COFEN page (www.cofen.gov.br), using the materials related to the pandemic COVID-19 since the first, published on February 14th, 2020 until the last of June 2020, totaling 280.

The empirical material was analyzed through thematic content analysis and discussed based on TAC and literature related to the new Coronavirus. The basis for the constitution of the material corpus was given through the news that were produced directly by COFEN’s Press Office (ASCOM - Assessoria de Comunicação). However, it is important to highlight that all the news were read for classification and selected those that could be discussed with the theory.

For the interpretation of the results, TAC was based, which considers ‘communicative action’ as an inclusion of speech situations, the application of language, contexts, pretensions and roles of dialogue. The communicative action contributes to the understanding of the health team work, considering that the theoretical approaches have as their purpose the search for possibilities of explanation or understanding of a certain phenomenon and, above all, of intervention in reality.

As this is a research with information in the public domain, there is no need to register with Plataforma Brasil for evaluation by a designated Research Ethics Committee.

**RESULTS**

The excerpts of the articles included were focused on the performance of COFEN in the context of the pandemic, based on guidance/ clarifications to professionals regarding information about the disease and the entity’s actions in coping with the disease. Thus, the interpretation of the empirical material provided the creation of the following thematic categories: ‘Communication in COVID-19 times: COFEN guidelines for professionals’ and ‘COFEN’s action in the context of COVID-19: The role of the entity in this scenario’.

Communication in times of COVID-19: COFEN guidelines for professionals

For this category, it is mentioned that the council produced technical notes as guiding instruments for professionals, approving resolutions and regulations, guiding the work process in facing the pandemic.

COFEN implemented, shortly after WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the Crisis Management Committee (CGC - Comitê Gestor de Crise) within the system, with the objective of managing and developing recommendations and emergency action strategies, based on forecasts of the Ministry of Health and other health authorities. Thus, the CGC became the main responsible within the scope of the COFEN/ COREN
system to follow the rules and, from them, to provide guidelines for nursing, as indicated in the excerpts that follow:

The Crisis Committee has received requests for information from professionals throughout Brazil (...). “We prepared a guiding document, in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organization, Ministry of Health (MH and other health authorities)”. (News - 03/20/2020).

Cofen published today a new version of the guidelines for the organization of health services in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The updates include changes in the indications for the use of personal protective equipment, considering the change in WHO guidelines and the progress of the disease in Brazil. (News - 04/23/2020).

With regard to the legislation approved for this period, the teleconsultation of nurses and the dimensioning of nursing staff stands out:

Resolution 634/2020 authorizes nurses to make consultations, orientations and referrals by technological means. "The participation of nurses in the fight against the pandemic is essential, especially in these moments of social isolation, when people need access to secure information and with the possibility of assistance without having to travel to health units". (News - 03/27/2020).

The Federal Nursing Council published a normative opinion that establishes the minimum number of nursing staff necessary for adequate assistance to patients affected by COVID-19 (...). (News - 05/18/2020).

The second category expresses the most relevant actions of COFEN in the scenario of COVID-19.

**COFEN’s actions in the context of COVID-19: the role of the entity in this scenario**

The performance of the system was focused on the acquisition and distribution of PPE through COREN, formalized actions with the Public Ministry and the judiciary, creation of the nursing observatory and a support channel in mental health for professionals.

With regard to PPE, Brazil, like other countries in the world, faced serious problems initially in relation to purchase and distribution, which generated difficulties in logistics, in addition to the increased need on a large scale. The excerpts below demonstrate COFEN’s actions with regard to the PPE problem:

In response to reports from professionals about the critical state of working conditions and lack of PPE, Cofen today published a public call for the purchase of N95 protective masks. (News - 03/25/2020).

(...) In view of the widespread reports of lack of PPE in healthcare units, the Cofen/ Regional Councils System has been articulating solutions with the public authorities and adding efforts to provide the necessary equipment. Corens from all regions of Brazil have distributed materials, such as surgical masks and N95, indicated in more invasive procedures. (News - 04/02/2020).

Other actions of the entity took place in the field of judicialization. Nursing professionals, for providing care to patients during 24 hours, were the most susceptible to illness due to COVID-19 and, consequently, risk of death. Thus, COFEN fought a struggle to remove the front line of professionals with advanced age and/or the risk group, in addition to focusing on the need for global testing, as shown in the following excerpts:

Cofen guidelines for the organization of health services during the pandemic recommend that these professionals should remain at the rear, in administrative functions, which are also essential. (News - 04/17/2020).

Cofen filed a public civil action, requesting emergency relief, to ensure that rapid tests for detecting the new coronavirus in nursing professionals are carried out. Comprehensive testing is one of the pillars for disease control. (News - 04/24/2020).

In addition to the creation of the CGC and the observatory, which has enabled COFEN to analyze the national scenario for the implementation of actions, a channel of emotional support for professionals involved in the work of the pandemic has also been established daily for 24 hours. Following are excerpts from COFEN’s activities related to these devices:

The Crisis Office created by COFEN is daily monitoring the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic for nursing professionals. The objective is to collect information to guide the system’s actions, monitor epidemiological data and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in each state, among other actions. (News - 04/30/2020).

(...) COFEN will provide a 24-hour service channel, every day of the week, so that nursing professionals can seek emotional help in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic situation (...) (News - 03/25/2020).
DISCUSSION

Many were the demands announced by nursing professionals in the midst of the crisis generated by COVID-19, both through the system’s ombudsman channel, as well as through the information generated for the CGC from the inspection of professional practice. The document prepared by the committee sought the organization of services for the assistance to be provided through the new coronavirus, with guidelines that included the formation of a rapid response team, definition of reception points for respiratory symptoms and other measures of adequacy to nursing care a be observed by the services, aiming at greater safety and protection for nursing professionals.\(^{11-12}\)

The nested communication for the category is associated, with regard to these guidelines, to a better understanding of postures and practices in this crisis situation. For Habermas, communication is mediated by language and starts from the assumption that it carries a communicative telos in itself, for the search for understanding. Thus, it is recognized that science, however specialized it may be, needs the framework of common language, not only in the dissemination phase, but also in its production.\(^{9,13}\)

The reality unveiled with COVID-19 led COFEN to rethink some practices of the profession, even authorizing the teleconsultation modality, allowing nurses to contact the patient even at a distance, simultaneously or asynchronously, with guidelines for the use of electronic means, respecting the ethical and legal principles of the profession.\(^{14}\)

The dimensioning of nursing professionals in public and private institutions, widely debated by COFEN Resolution 543/2017, required adaptations for this scenario, including considering the creation of field hospitals across the country. The norm recommended, in addition to changes in calculation, a Technical Safety Index from 15% to 20%, due to the significant increase in the number of retired professionals who are also affected by the disease.\(^{15-16}\)

In TAC, aspects that support the understanding of mutual understanding and the interface between the social world and the action based on norms are approached, based on the principle that through language, men constitute subjects of action, establishing a context of relationships and social interactions that trigger change processes. Through the media, the public sphere mediates a communicational structure referring to the social space generated in communicative action and in its leadership capacity.\(^{17-18}\)

To this end, the COFEN website has presented these regulations to professionals, enabling them to know and update them in order to expand their ability to argue in the services in the face of the challenging and conflicting situations generated by COVID-19. Due to its political representativeness and attributions conferred by law, COFEN has the duty and responsibility to use the multiple communication mechanisms so that this information reaches the nursing community across the country.

Regarding the PPE difficulties, the services, following the recommendations of the National Health Surveillance Agency, started to cover the most used, such as the N95/ PFF2 mask, recommended for the realization of devices that generate aerosols, with guidelines for prolonged reuse of that device.\(^{19}\) With the purchase made by COFEN, the Brazilian states received these devices through the Regional Councils.

The request for removal of nursing professionals considered to be at-risk groups was based on data generated by the nursing observatory, a platform created with the purpose of monitoring cases and deaths related to the disease across the country, so that they could be relocated in management, support or assistance activities in areas where there was no contact with suspected or contaminated patients by COVID-19. The municipality won the right to test the professionals, regardless of clinical symptoms, as long as their participation in tackling the pandemic is proven.\(^{20-21}\)

The emotional support channel was created with the objective of providing support to nursing professionals in the front line of COVID-19, carried out by nurses with degrees in the field of mental health with assistance via live chat after filling out the form, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of demands.\(^{22}\)

Nursing professionals have experienced across the country, in addition to emotional/mental exhaustion as a result of the pandemic, a high rate of illness and death, according to data pointed out by the nursing observatory, placing Brazil in the ranking of the highest number of deaths of nurses Worldwide. For being on that front in your work, the weight of physical and emotional exhaustion is felt.\(^{23-24}\) The data brought by the nursing observatory and the CGC demonstrate that the situation requires effective public policies in all governmental instances, with actions that they value in this category, considering the problems still faced even with the advent of the vaccine.

Analyzing these COFEN actions in the light of Habermasian theory, language is reinforced as a background, fundamental to communicative processes, from what is understood, felt and accessed to the meanings and themes that involve the world, bringing, based on the rationality imposed by language, a broad horizon of communicative interaction.\(^{25}\)

Vis-à-vis these arguments, COFEN has sought, in addition to a communication with a focus on guidance and clarifications on its actions at that time, that the nursing community, managers, politicians, magistrates and the popu-
CONCLUSION

COFEN provided communication with awareness and knowledge to professionals, in order to empower them in work processes so that they strive for better working conditions and compliance with health standards, thus minimizing the impact of the disease. This communication, in addition to being necessary, is configured as a political act, allowing nursing to talk about their demands and challenges in different work scenarios with their peers. The municipality has sought to give visibility to how the pandemic has changed the life and work of the category, in the most diverse contexts, and how much it is needed at all times of assistance.

The use of a communicative theory for investigations of this nature enriches the analysis and points to other paths, including the possibility of studying the communication developed by other professional associations in nursing, such as the Brazilian Nursing Association, National Federation of Nurses and unions.