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REVIEW ARTICLE

Work-related mental and behaviour disorders in anesthesiologists

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KEYWORDS

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Abstract

Background: Anaesthesiology is a specialty whose specificity of the working process results in high levels of stress as an inevitable condition – a particularly worrying situation in the daily life of these professionals.

Objectives: This study, based on data from national and international literature, aims to discuss the basis of the occurrence of mental and behavioural disorders or of psychopathological injuries (psychological distress) related to working activity in anesthesiologists.

Method: A literature review was conducted, with papers selected from Medline and Lilacs databases, published between 2000 and 2012 in Portuguese, English and Spanish, and addressing the possible association between occupational hazards of the anaesthesiologist profession and mental health problems and psychic distress. Twenty-six publications were listed.

Results: Several aspects of the anesthesiologist's work are important points to better understand the relationship between mental health at work and working organization. Poor temporal structuring of work, conflictuous interpersonal relationships and poor control over the activity itself may be mentioned as illness enhancers.

Conclusion: The working organization, when not appropriate, is an important occupational risk factor for the life and mental health of workers, mainly of professionals focused on the care of people. This paper focuses on anesthesiologists, who are constantly exposed to stressful and anxiogenic factors.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Anestesiologia;
Organização;
Estresse psicológico;
Doenças profissionais

Transtornos mentais e do comportamento relacionados ao trabalho em médicos anesthesiologistas**Resumo**

Justificativa: A anestesiologia é uma especialidade cuja especificidade do processo de trabalho torna elevados níveis de estresse uma condição inevitável, situação preocupante no cotidiano desses profissionais.

Objetivos: O presente estudo, fundamentado em dados da literatura nacional e internacional, tem o propósito de discutir as bases da ocorrência de transtornos mentais e de comportamento ou agravos psicopatológicos (sofrimento psíquico) relacionados à atividade laboral em médicos anesthesiologistas.

Método: Fez-se uma revisão de literatura em que foram selecionados artigos científicos nas bases de dados Medline e Lilacs, publicados entre 2000 e 2012, em português, inglês e espanhol, que abordam a possível associação entre riscos ocupacionais da profissão de médico anesthesiologista e problemas de saúde mental e sofrimento psíquico. Foram enumeradas 26 publicações.

Resultados: Vários aspectos do trabalho do médico anesthesiologista apresentam-se como pontos importantes para a compreensão das relações entre saúde mental no trabalho e organização do trabalho. Podem ser destacados como adoecedores a má estruturação temporal do trabalho, as relações interpessoais conflituosas e o mau controle sobre a própria atividade.

Conclusão: A organização do trabalho, quando não adequada, é um importante fator de risco ocupacional para a vida e a saúde mental dos trabalhadores, principalmente, dos profissionais voltados para o cuidado de pessoas. O foco presente são os médicos anesthesiologistas, constantemente expostos a fatores estressantes e ansiogênicos.

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Introduction

In this second decade of the XXI century, the occurrence of mental and behavioural disorders is increasing. Among the various causal factors, working activity appears to play an important role in the development and evolution of psychic disorders.¹

Studies on psychological morbidity in health workers indicate that among the higher level professionals, physicians are those who exhibit high rates of alcoholism, stress and depression, and a large number of these professionals use psychotropic or other drugs. In this context, their work is seen as an important cause for such a situation.² Sleep disturbances, working permits and absenteeism caused by psychopathological problems, depressive and anxiety disorders and even suicidal ideation are also related.³

Therefore, it is appropriate an attempt to understand the possibility of association of mental and behavioural disorders related to physicians' work, particularly anesthesiologists', since inevitably this is a specialty in which the specificity of the work generates high levels of stress,^{4,5} maybe resulting in important psychic distress, work dissatisfaction and even a burnout syndrome.^{6,7} Possibly all these aspects make even more serious the situation of these professionals.

It is within this context that the present study aims to discuss, based on data from national and international literature, the foundations of the occurrence of mental and behavioural disorders or psychopathological diseases (psychic distress) related to working activity in anesthesiologists.

Method

A literature review of published articles about mental and behavioural disorders or psychopathological diseases (psychic distress) related to the work of anesthesiologists was conducted. To obtain the theoretical framework, only scientific articles were selected from the Virtual Health Library (VHL) with search of Lilacs (Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences) and Medline (Online System search and Analysis of Medical Literature) databases. The following keywords and their possible combinations by descriptors were used: sofrimento psíquico/*psychological stress/estresse psicológico/estresse*; saúde mental/*mental health/salud mental*; trabalho/*work/trabajo*; médico/*physician*; anestesia/*anesthesia/anaesthesia*; anestesiologia/*anesthesiology*; anesthesiologista/*anaesthesiologist/anaesthetist*/anestesiólogo/anestésista.

The inclusion criteria were: articles published in English, Portuguese and Spanish from January 2000 to May 2012 and that addressed the possible association between the theme "anaesthesiologists' work" and aspects related to mental health problems and psychic distress, quality of life, working process, risks inherent to the profession and/or conceptions on these subjects. Papers that related mental disorder to specific professional classes not pertaining to the medical profession and to anesthesiologists were excluded.

An active search among references of the articles obtained was conducted, in order to identify relevant articles that had not been collected in the initial search and that met the above criteria.

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