

## Health Professional Safety: Toward a Humanized, Resilient, and Sustainable Health System

*Segurança do Profissional de Saúde: Por um Sistema de Saúde Humanizado, Resiliente e Sustentável*

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The safety of health professionals is an essential pillar of policies, organizations, and daily practices that is often overlooked (Gontijo et al., 2020). The predominance of patient safety as a central pillar of the institutional culture has overshadowed the need to discuss the safety of health professionals.

It is crucial to acknowledge that safe care is impossible without safe health professionals. Caring and being cared for are interconnected. The global health emergency brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has made old, neglected issues more visible, such as work overload, shortages of human and material resources, ethical distress, psychosocial strain, and continuous exposure to risky situations (Silva et al., 2024; Oliveira Júnior et al., 2024).

In response to this scenario, the World Health Organization (WHO) published the Health Worker Safety Charter in 2020, which states unequivocally that protecting health workers is a fundamental requirement for efficient health systems and healthy societies (Organização Mundial da Saúde, 2020). This charter positions the safety of health professionals as a strategic pillar for strengthening health systems, closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

However, advancing this agenda requires building an organizational culture that also focuses on the safety of health professionals. The WHO Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021-2030 recognizes this need by including, among its seven strategic objectives, the education, skills, and safety of health professionals (Organização Mundial da Saúde, 2021). This inclusion reinforces the inseparable link between the safety of health professionals and the safety of patients.

However, the safety of health professionals cannot remain at a symbolic or normative level. It must be implemented across institutional practices, ranging from management processes to workplace relationships. Recent studies have examined the safety of health professionals in different care settings (Freitas, 2024; Gontijo et al., 2022; Oliveira Júnior, 2025; Silva et al., 2021). Four dimensions of safety have been identified: organizational, emotional, professional, and structural (Lanza et al., 2025).

The organizational dimension covers aspects related to effective communication, management practices and resources, teamwork organization, the use of care protocols, and the qualifications of health professionals. The emotional dimension refers to professionals' perceptions of their feelings, emotions, personal attitudes, professional fulfillment, and motivation to provide care. The professional dimension analyzes technical competence in the exercise of the profession, based on the triad of knowledge, skill, and attitude, as well as professionals' perceptions of their safety when performing tasks. This dimension highlights the influence of continuous training and professional recognition on confidence and performance. Finally, the structural dimension involves aspects such as adequate staffing, the physical conditions of the care environment, and the availability of supplies, personal protective equipment, and permanent materials (Lanza et al., 2025).

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Understanding these four dimensions enables the adoption of a more comprehensive and sensitive approach to the safety of health professionals that informs the development of policies and strategies that transcend discourse and become effective institutional practices. To achieve this, organizational policies committed to the safety of health professionals should include mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation. Measurement tools, such as the recently validated “Questionnaire on Health Professional Safety in the COVID-19 Pandemic (QSP COVID-19)”, can be adapted to the current context and used to inform evidence-based management decisions (Lanza et al., 2025). In this context, health professionals should be actively involved in decisions that affect their daily work, as recommended by the WHO (Organização Mundial da Saúde, 2021). Collaborative participation is not only desirable; it is a legitimate and necessary means of transforming practices, consolidating safe working environments, and promoting organizational justice. Ultimately, reflecting on the safety of health professionals is also a reflection on the foundations of an accessible and equitable health system that provides humanized care and is structured to address health challenges in a sustainable way. After all, defending the right to health begins with protecting and ensuring the safety of those who guarantee this right in their daily work.

Humanizing systems requires recognizing that health professionals are not replaceable part, but unique individuals with histories, feelings, limitations, and potential. It involves implementing active listening practices, promoting care among caregivers, fostering horizontal workplace relationships, and providing spaces for continuous training and education, as well as rest, support, and recovery (Freitas, 2024; Gontijo, 2019; Oliveira Júnior, 2025; Silva, 2020). It also means acknowledging health professionals as ethical, relational, and social beings (Gontijo et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2021).

In turn, strengthening these systems means preparing them to respond effectively to crises, whether health-related, environmental, or social. This is not possible without safe, well-prepared health professionals (Silva et al., 2021; Gontijo et al., 2022). Organizational resilience is not based on improvisation, but on solid structures, ethical leadership (Silva et al., 2021), institutional support networks, and continuous investment in training and emotional support. Finally, the sustainability of health systems is intrinsically linked to professional recognition and equitable workplace relationships. Sustainability cannot be achieved when excessive turnover, physical and emotional exhaustion, undervalued careers, and precarious work prevail (Freitas, 2024; Gontijo, 2019; Oliveira Júnior, 2025; Silva, 2020). Sustainable systems require consistent policies that value health work, participatory management models, and investments in decent work.

Overcoming the false dichotomy between patient safety and health professional safety is an urgent matter. Safe environments for patients are only possible when health professionals also feel safe. More than a technical imperative, it is an ethical commitment and a fundamental human right. Investing in the safety of health professionals means investing in dignity, social justice, and equity. It entails the practical implementation of principles that are often confined to institutional documents. Above all, it is a decisive step toward building health systems that are not only truly humanized in their essence, but also sustainable and resilient in the face of adversity.

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