

## COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE BETWEEN HOSPITAL AND LONG-TERM FACILITIES FOR THE CARE OF PATIENTS WITH COVID-19

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Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The disease produced by SARS-CoV-2 has led to severe situations and mortality in elderly people. The objective of this study was to describe the collaboration between hospital professionals and nursing homes when applying preventive measures for the transmission of COVID-19 and in the assistance of institutionalized patients.

**Methods:** A descriptive study was carried out in 4 centers with information collected by researchers in two moments of the COVID-19 pandemic. The information collected was related to the resources and knowledge of infection prevention, details about face-to-face and telematic assistance from the hospital team, as well as material, drugs provided, and clinical results. Statistical chi-square tests and McNemar's test were used.

**Results:** The study was conducted in 4 centers with a total of 640 residents and an initial occupancy between 62% and 85%. Differences were found regarding the ratio of staff and knowledge of preventive measures of the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 infection, which was improved in the second period of the study. The number of face-to-face visits (from 5 to 22) and telematic visits (between 42 and 109 patients) were different in the 4 nursing homes, as well as the material provided, adapted to the needs of each center. The percentage of infected patients ranged from 6.1% to 90.2%, and the accumulated mortality in the second period ranged from 15.38% to 38.35% of the residents at the beginning of the pandemic.

**Conclusions:** The collaboration between the professionals of healthcare centers and the hospital, adapted to the needs of each center, has allowed to improve the assistance to the residents and the coordination between the professionals, optimizing the available resources.

**Key words:** Long-term care facilities, Nursing homes, Coordination, Health professionals, Elderly care, COVID-19.

### RESUMEN

#### Experiencia de colaboración entre hospital y centros sociosanitarios para la atención de pacientes con COVID-19

**Fundamentos:** La enfermedad producida por SARS-CoV-2 ha provocado situaciones de mayor gravedad y mortalidad en las personas mayores. El objetivo de este estudio fue describir la colaboración entre profesionales del hospital y de las residencias en la aplicación de medidas de prevención de la transmisión de COVID-19 y en la asistencia de pacientes institucionalizados.

**Métodos:** Se realizó un estudio descriptivo en 4 centros sociosanitarios con información recogida por los investigadores en dos momentos de la pandemia por COVID-19. Se recogió información relacionada con los recursos y conocimiento de la prevención de infecciones, detalles sobre la asistencia presencial y telemática del equipo del hospital, así como material, fármacos suministrados y resultados clínicos. Las variables estudiadas se describieron mediante porcentajes, frecuencias absolutas y ratios y se utilizaron las pruebas estadísticas de chi cuadrado y el test de Mc-Nemar.

**Resultados:** Se realizó el estudio en 4 centros con un total de 640 residentes y una ocupación inicial entre el 62% y 85%. Se encontraron diferencias respecto al ratio de personal, conocimiento de medidas de prevención de transmisión de la infección por SARS-Cov 2, mejorando este último en el segundo periodo de estudio. El número de consultas presenciales (de 5 a 22) y telemáticas (entre 42 y 109 pacientes) fueron diferentes en las 4 residencias, así como el material aportado, adaptándonos a las necesidades de cada centro. El porcentaje de pacientes contagiados varió entre el 6,1% y el 90,2% y la mortalidad acumulada en el segundo periodo osciló entre el 15,38% y el 38,35% de los residentes que había al principio de la pandemia.

**Conclusiones:** La colaboración entre los profesionales de los centros sociosanitarios y del hospital adaptada a las necesidades de cada centro ha permitido mejorar la asistencia a los residentes y la coordinación entre los profesionales, optimizando los recursos disponibles.

**Palabras clave:** Centros sociosanitarios, Residencias, Coordinación, Profesionales sanitarios, Cuidados a personas mayores, COVID-19.

Suggested citation: Sáez-López P, Arredondo-Provecho AB. Collaborative experience between hospital and long-term facilities for the care of patients with COVID-19. Rev Esp Salud Pública. 2021; 95: April 14<sup>th</sup> e202104053.

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## INTRODUCTION

In January 2020 the SARS-CoV-2 virus disease known as COVID-19 was detected in Wuhan, China. The outbreak transmission was so quick that on 11<sup>th</sup> March the World Health Organization (WHO) classified it as a pandemic<sup>(1)</sup>. Currently, it is affecting the entire world, with 36,754,395 cases and 1,064,834 deaths as of 9<sup>th</sup> October<sup>(2)</sup>. Italy was the first European country to report local transmission<sup>(3)</sup>. Other countries such as Spain are heavily affected, with a total of 861,112 cases, of which 261,762 in the Community of Madrid and 32,929 deaths, of which 9,739 have been in the same community as of 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020<sup>(4)</sup>.

The risk of severe SARS-CoV-2 infection and death is much higher in older patients and/or those with comorbidity<sup>(5,6,7)</sup>.

While in the general population, the most common symptoms were fever, cough, dyspnea, myalgia, anosmia and respiratory distress<sup>(8)</sup>, in the elderly, it manifested atypically with delirium, instability, diarrhea, falls and asymptomatic, who were up to 50% of infected patients<sup>(9,10)</sup>.

The greater degree of frailty, functional dependence and cognitive impairment of people living in nursing homes means that they require more assistance, which increases contact with workers and with each other because they share rooms and common rooms. These facts, together with the contagion of the workers themselves and their poor training in infection prevention, contributed to the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 disease in these centers<sup>(11,12)</sup>.

All these circumstances determine the data available on the incidence and mortality of elderly people in nursing homes during the pandemic, with figures varying between 30% and 60% of those infected, depending on the series,

and a mortality of 33% in only 3 weeks after the first diagnosed case<sup>(13)</sup>.

There are known modifiable factors, endorsed by the recommendations of the WHO and the British Geriatric Society Center for Disease Control, which can reduce the impact of the pandemic, such as providing protective material and training in its use together with education in hand hygiene and surface cleaning, such as providing protective material and training in its use together with education in hand hygiene and surface cleaning. Further impact could be achieved by providing tests to identify those infected and isolate them, sectorization to prevent new infections and trying to ensure that there are workers to meet the demands for each group of patients in specified areas or spaces to avoid the transmission. The implementation of these measures is not easy because of the great heterogeneity of nursing homes, the changing situation, the variability in the architecture of the buildings, the presence of a leader or manager who knows the rules and ensures compliance, and the availability of human resources and protective equipment<sup>(11,12,14,15,16)</sup>.

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, the Spanish Ministry of Health also published the Guide to prevention and control of COVID-19 disease in nursing homes and other social services center, which includes adapted contingency plans and measures to protect residents and workers' health<sup>(17)</sup>.

Considering the paramount importance of COVID-19 disease in institutionalized elderly people and the difficulty of preventing contagion in this environment, it is essential to carry out a multidisciplinary plan, individualized for each center, and to implement measures to prevent transmission and provide the highest quality care.

At the Hospital Universitario Fundación Alcorcón (HUFA), there was already collaboration between the Geriatrics, Internal Medicine,

Care's Continuity and Preventive Medicine services and the four nursing homes to facilitate access to hospital resources for residents, by means of clinical advice, procedures for tests or treatments, video calls and regular face-to-face consultations by the Internal Medicine Service since 2017 and with the Geriatrics Unit since 2019. Besides, regular sessions on basic hygiene and disinfection measures to prevent the transmission of microorganisms, proper waste management and handling of residents with infectious pathologies and multi-resistant pathogens were given to all workers. When the pandemic was declared, the Community of Madrid appointed a liaison geriatrician in all public hospitals to intensify clinical support and implement preventive measures to avoid dissemination and thus improve the care of residents with suspected SARS-CoV-2 infection. The hospital delegates this task to a team of a geriatrician, two nurses of preventive medicine, a physiotherapist and an internal medicine resident.

The aim of this article was to present the experience of collaboration between the hospital and residential healthcare team in the care of patients and in the application of transmission prevention measures of COVID-19 disease in four nursing homes and to describe the implementation and clinical outcomes in each of them.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

This article is a descriptive study carried out in two time periods during the pandemic in 2020, in the four nursing homes of Alcorcón, a municipality in the Community of Madrid. The first period was from 20<sup>th</sup> March to 20<sup>th</sup> April and the second from 21<sup>st</sup> April to 15<sup>th</sup> May.

The intervention of the hospital care team (liaison geriatrician and nurses of preventive medicine) was adapted to all needs detected in each nursing home, taking into account the

resources available to them, although the same general prevention guidelines and treatment protocols were used in all of them, following the recommendations of the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and the Community of Madrid.

The geriatrician's main task was to coordinate care, advising the doctors and assessing the individual clinical needs of each resident in terms of tests, medication and hospital referral if necessary. While the nurses focused their work on training workers, advising residents of the measures that were put in place together with the nurses, doctors and directors of each center, implementing and monitoring hygiene and dissemination control measures, such as sectorization, isolation, establishing food, clothing and waste circuits. Also, they participated in defining hot, warm and clean areas to avoid contagion, putting up information signs and instructing in the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as advising the nurses of the center on what they needed. Furthermore, the material needed was provided for residents' care and protective equipment for the professionals when they were not available, although the hospital also lacked of material. We also collaborated with the geriatrician in the procedures required and diagnostic tests were carried out and completed, with the limitations based on the availability of the laboratory to carry out microbiological tests (polymerase chain reaction: PCR).

To collect the information, the authors of this article designed a specific form, but it is not validated. It was completed with the data provided by the responsible for each center and the hospital team's own register with information related to the human and material resources of the residences and clinical support of the hospital, as well as patients suspected of suffering from COVID-19 disease. The data were evaluated at two points in time during the pandemic.

Some variables referred to two specific days, one day of each period, and other data referred to both time periods of several days.

There were three types of variables collected:

i) Concerning the characteristics of the nursing home, human and material resources and knowledge of infection prevention: number of residents, ratio of medical, nursing and assistant workers, availability of hydroalcoholic solutions and disinfectants, differentiated circuits according to the location of infected patients or not, respect for defined areas and specific workers for each area, waste management, cleaning, application of precautions to prevent transmission, knowledge of the indication and correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE), availability of PPE and masks.

ii) Assistance from the hospital team and material provided from the hospital to the nursing home: number of visits weekly made by geriatrician, nurses and physiotherapist, number of residents with telephone and face-to-face follow-up by Geriatrics, material provided and tests carried out (drugs, protective material and diagnostic tests for SARS-CoV-2 and blood tests).

iii) Clinical outcomes in patients including any person living in the nursing homes in the area with suspected COVID-19 disease: date of the first suspected or confirmed case with SARS-CoV-2 infection, number of infected, number of admissions to hospital, number of people cured and number of deceased ones. Patients for whom the hospital team is not consulted or without clinical symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 disease were excluded from the analysis.

The variables studied were described using percentages, absolute frequencies and ratios. The chi-square test and the McNemar test were

used to compare the variables. Data analysis was carried out using the statistical program SPSS for Windows version 21.

The study was approved by the Clinical Research Ethics Committee on Medicinal Products of the Hospital Universitario Fundación Alcorcón.

## RESULTS

**Characteristics of care homes: human and material resources and knowledge about infections.** The characteristics of the four social and healthcare centers were heterogeneous in terms of size, number of residents, workers ratio, public and/or private ownership and resources, as shown in [table 1](#) (nursing homes were codified with the following: nursing home 1-NH1, nursing home 2-NH2, nursing home 3-NH3, nursing home 4-NH4).

In the first study period, the percentage of occupation with respect to authorized places varied between 81-85% for NH2, NH3 and NH4 and 62% for NH1. In all of them, occupation decreased in the second study period, between 8.2% and 21.3%.

Regarding human resources ([table 1](#)), differences were found in terms of workers ratios between the 4 nursing homes in the different categories, with nursing home 1 standing out with lower ratios. This situation improved in the second period in centers 1 and 4 following the incorporation of workers on sick leave, new agreements and a reduction in the number of residents.

With reference to knowledge about infection transmission prevention and availability of protective material ([table 2](#)), a shortage of material resources and difficulty in their proper use was observed in the first period in the NH1. The evolution of the variables measuring the

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of nursing homes and human resources.**

Characteristics	First period from 20 <sup>th</sup> March to 20 <sup>th</sup> April 7 <sup>th</sup> of April				Second period from 21 <sup>st</sup> April to 15 <sup>th</sup> May 4 <sup>th</sup> of May			
	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4
Number of residents	120	120	147	150	71	102	114	111
Authorized places	146	148	180	177	146	148	180	143
Occupation	82%	81%	82%	85%	49%	69%	63%	78%
Medical care (hours/weeks)	40	70	168	75-80	40	70	168	145
Nursing care (24 hours/day)	2m <sup>(*)</sup> -2a <sup>(*)</sup> -2n <sup>(*)</sup>	2m-2a-1n	3m-3a-1n	3m-3a-2n	2m-2a-2n	2m-2a-1n	3m-2a-1n	6m-3a-2n
Ratio of nurses/residents	1:60; 1:60; 1:60	1:55; 1:55; 1:111	1:47; 1:47; 1:70	1:50; 1:50; 1:75	1:41; 1:41; 1:41	1:55; 1:55; 1:111	1:45; 1:68; 1:136	1:24; 1:49; 1:74
Assistant nursing technician care (24h/day)	9m-8a-3n	14m-13a-3n	21m-0a 6 shifts of 12h	3m-21a-8n	9m-8a-3n	14m-13a-3n	15m-0a-5m shifts of 12h	24m-21a-6n
Ratio of assistant nursing technician/residents	1:13; 1:15; 1:40	1:8; 1:8; 1:4	1:8; 1:23	1:8; 1:7; 1:19	1:9; 1:10; 1:27	1:9; 1:27	1:9; 1:27	1:6; 1:7; 1:24
Cleaning/resident ratio	1m-1a-0n	9m-7a-0n	6m-1a-0n	17m-12a-0n	4m-2a-0n	9m-7a-0n	5m-1a-0n	25m-11a-0n
(*) m=morning; a=afternoon; n=night.								

availability of protective material and learning about infection prevention improved in all centers one month after the start of the pandemic (table 2), although one of them showed a good implementation of the measures from the beginning of the pandemic (NH2).

All centers operated under the protocols of the Regional Social Politics, Family, Equality and Natality and the Health Department, which were regularly updated.

**Hospital team assistance and material provided by the hospital (tables 3 to 5).** Attendance by the nurses of preventive medicine at nursing homes was adapted to each one needs, varying

between 16 and 7 visits in a month, as shown in table 3.

The liaison geriatrician's counselling work was mostly by telephone, following the instructions of the Regional Ministry, in order to be able to attend all nursing homes on a daily basis and maintain the hospital care work assigned to them. There was a significant difference in the number of residents attended by geriatricians both in person (higher in nursing homes 1, 2 and 3) and by telephone (with higher figures in nursing homes 3 and 4).

Regarding protective material (table 4), the same material was delivered as was used in the

**Table 2**  
**Material resources and knowledge of infection transmission prevention measures related to the care of residents.**

Resources	First period from 20 <sup>th</sup> March to 20 <sup>th</sup> April 7 <sup>th</sup> of April				Second period from 21 <sup>st</sup> April to 15 <sup>th</sup> May 4 <sup>th</sup> of May			
	N. home 1	N. home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4	Nursing home 1	N. home 2	N. home 3	N. home 4
Availability of hydroalcoholic solutions	NO HUFJA <sup>(*)</sup> PROVIDES	YES	YES HUFJA <sup>(*)</sup> PROVIDES TO MEET A GROWING NEED	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Availability of surface disinfectant	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Know the use and dilution of disinfectant	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Defined COVID-19 circuits (+ and -)	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Circuits are respected	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Signposting of the area	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO BUT THEY KNOW COVID-19 RESIDENTS LOCATION	YES	YES	YES
Waste manager	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Adequate cleaning	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
Workers are aware of the measures to be applied in each case	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Know the precautions to prevent the transmission of microorganisms	PRE-PANDEMIC FORMATION. DIFFICULTIES IN APPLYING IT	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Know the indications of PPE. Correct use according to the task to be carried out	NO	YES	YES	SESSIONS ARE PROVIDED TO ALL STAFF ON ALL SHIFTS	YES	YES	YES	YES
Availability of PPE	NO	YES	YES	YES	SHORTAGE	YES	YES HUFJA <sup>(*)</sup> PROVIDES	YES
Availability of masks	NO, JUST FFP2 WITH INAPPROPRIATE USE	YES	YES, FOR THE STAFF. HUFJA <sup>(*)</sup> PROVIDES FOR RESIDENTS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Specific workers for the COVID-19 defined area	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO BUT START THE ACTIVITY BY CLEAN ZONE AND DECONTAMINATE THEMSELVES	YES	YES	YES

(\*) HUFJA: Hospital Universitario Fundación Alcorcón. The equipment provided corresponded to donations and wasn't certified.

**Table 3**  
**Hospital team assistance.**

Assistance	First period from 20 <sup>th</sup> March to 20 <sup>th</sup> April				Second period from 21 <sup>st</sup> April to 15 <sup>th</sup> May			
	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4
N° visits/week nurses of preventive medicine	16	7	10	15	4	4	4	6
N° visits/week geriatrician/doctor	8	10	2	1	1	1	2	2
N° residents assisted in person	20	21	22	5	18	7	21	15
N° residents assisted by phone	42	60	109	88	22	48	90	85

hospital itself, and again differences were observed, with a greater contribution to nursing homes 1 and 3, although NH3 also had weekly donations that covered their needs. Nursing homes 2 and 4 had sufficient material from the beginning because they were supplied or through private purchase.

In relation to the hospital drugs provided by the hospital Pharmacy, most were intravenous antibiotics and hydroxychloroquine (with a greater contribution to nursing homes 3 and 4). The drugs were provided with a prescription from geriatrics to the patient who needed them, applying a protocol drawn up and agreed in the hospital and known by the nursing home doctors, so that all the centers had the same access to this resource for their patients (table 4).

The possibility of performing PCR for COVID-19 diagnosis in the hospital itself was limited by the capacity of the laboratory and the tests were distributed according to the clinical indication at any moment. During the study periods, two centers were able to perform PCR either privately or through a university laboratory (table 5).

**Clinical patients' outcomes (table 6).** At the beginning of the pandemic, the total number of residents among the 4 nursing homes was 640. The prevalence of residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 disease was compared on two specific dates of the two periods (7<sup>th</sup> April and 4<sup>th</sup> May). In the second period the number was higher (223 vs. 138) and the difference between periods was statistically significant in all nursing homes, but the NH2 was lower in the second study period, as shown in table 6.

Cases of residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 disease among all those in the nursing home on 7<sup>th</sup> April ranged from 6.1% to 90.2%. Considering both periods, nursing homes 1 and 4 had the highest number of cases, with a significant difference ( $p=0.0001$ ). The number of residents requiring hospital admission was higher in the first period. NH3 and NH4 admitted more residents in all the study.

The number of deaths was much higher in the first period in all nursing homes. The cumulative morbidity of NH1 and NH4 on 4<sup>th</sup> May among residents at the beginning of the pandemic was higher than in the other two

**Table 4**  
**Protective and pharmacological material provided by the hospital.**

Material	First period from 20 <sup>th</sup> March to 20 <sup>th</sup> April				Second period from 21 <sup>st</sup> April to 15 <sup>th</sup> May			
	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4
Masks	10 hygienic mask bags. 2 surgical masks boxes.	-	Material to make masks and 5 surgical masks boxes.	-	10 hygienic mask bags	Mask restraint devices	20 hygienic mask bags.	-
PPEs	30 plastic aprons and 20 waterproof gowns	-	4 PPEs. 40 waterproof gowns	-	54 DGM	1 box of plastic sleeve	20 waterproof gowns and 20 plastic aprons	-
Face shields	67	-	34	20	20	-	50	150
Disposable gown	4 boxes of 100	-	2 boxes	-	2 boxes	-	-	-
Gloves	2 boxes	-	4 boxes	-	-	-	5 boxes	-
Headcovers	2 bags	-	2 bags	-	2 bags	-	-	-
Shrouds	10	-	13	-	-	-	-	-
Hydroalcoholic solutions	10 HUFA 17 DGM <sup>(*)</sup>	-	5	-	10	-	5	-
Antibiotic doses (vial form)	10	36	20	87	28	20	77	48
Hydroxychloroquine	120	48	144	104	38	0	44	64
Corticosteroids	-	-	-	21	-	-	-	-

\* DGM = Directorate General of elderly people. It is where elderly can have specific attention to their needs.

**Table 5**  
**Diagnostic tests performed.**

Tests	First period from 20 <sup>th</sup> March to 20 <sup>th</sup> April				Second period from 21 <sup>st</sup> April to 15 <sup>th</sup> May			
	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	N. home 3	N. home 4	N.home 1	N. home 2	N. home 3	N. home 4
Blood tests	4	-	0	0	-	2	3	4
PCR	17	TOTAL 98. 5 HUFA and 93 private company	19	TOTAL 140. 20 in HUFA and 120 in Universidad Complutense	9	28 private company	TOTAL 99. 19 in HUFA and 80 in Universidad Complutense	200 in Universidad Complutense
Rapid tests	100 rapid tests were received as donation. HUFA gives 24	25 HUFA	100 HUFA	Rapid tests > 100	DGM50	0	0	0
Disinfection by Military Emergency Unit	YES. Police protection equipment and civil protection intervention requested	Exterior front only. 2 private disinfections were hired for the front in the back side of the building.	YES	YES	YES	Outdoor disinfection	YES	YES



**Table 6**  
**Clinical patients' outcomes.**

Variables	First period from 20 <sup>th</sup> March to 20 <sup>th</sup> April				Second period from 2 <sup>1st</sup> April to 15 <sup>th</sup> May			
	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4	Nursing home 1	Nursing home 2	Nursing home 3	Nursing home 4
Date of the first suspected case	08/03/2020	17/03/2020	02/04/2020	15/03/2020	-	-	-	-
Total number of residents at the beginning of the pandemic	133	130	174	170	-	-	-	-
Total number of residents on 7 <sup>th</sup> April of the first period and 4 <sup>th</sup> May of the second period	91	120	147	150	82	110	136	147
Number of healthy or recovered COVID-19 residents on 7 <sup>th</sup> April of first period and 4 <sup>th</sup> May of second period	18	103	138	111	8	110	81	53
Number of COVID-19 residents on 7 <sup>th</sup> April of the first period and 4 <sup>th</sup> May of the second period	73	17	9	39	74	0	55	94
Prevalence of infected people on 7 <sup>th</sup> April and 4 <sup>th</sup> May	80.22%	14.17%	6.12%	26%	90.24%	0.001%	40.44%	63.95%
Cumulative mortality since the beginning of the pandemic in each period (20 <sup>th</sup> March to 20 <sup>th</sup> April and 21 <sup>st</sup> April to 15 <sup>th</sup> May)	49	18	33	39	3	2	1	3
Number of residents admitted in the first and second periods	13	4	25	18	2	3	7	15
Cumulative mortality since the beginning of the pandemic measured as of 7 <sup>th</sup> April and 4 <sup>th</sup> May	42	10	27	20	51	20	38	59
Cumulative mortality prevalence over residents at the beginning of the pandemic as of 7 <sup>th</sup> April and 4 <sup>th</sup> May	31.58%	7.69%	15.52%	11.76%	38.35%	15.38%	21.84%	34.71%
Comparison of the prevalence of COVID-19 patients by period.	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001	0.2637	-	-	-	-
MC - NEMAR TEST. P VALUE								

nursing homes, with figures ranging from 29.1% to 38.35%.

## DISCUSSION

The intention of this article was to describe the collaborative activity between a team of Geriatrics and Preventive Medicine workers of the hospital and the care team of all nursing homes in the area, which were supported by clinical care and infection prevention guidelines.

The mode of clinical support has been similar in all centers, although adapted to individual needs. However, large differences have been observed between the four nursing homes, both in terms of human and material resources, information and adaptation of prevention measures, as well as clinical outcomes.

The activities carried out by the nurses on counselling on the use of protective measures, application of the sectorization guidelines to

each site, training sessions and review of compliance with the recommendations<sup>(17)</sup> justified numerous visits in the first days of the intervention and were subsequently reduced in the second period due to learning and better adherence to the recommendations and improved infection control, which supports the usefulness of these measures.

The support provided by geriatrics was mostly telematics, enabling the numerous procedures and guidelines to be streamlined through hundreds of calls and e-mails. However, the geriatrician's face-to-face assistance to the centers was necessary in certain particularly critical circumstances and varied according to the number of acute patients, the availability of doctors in the hospital and the presence of health workers from the nursing home itself.

In nursing home 1, the first case was detected earlier than the rest, on 8<sup>th</sup> March, at a time when not enough was known about how to prevent the transmission. In addition, there was a lower workers' ratio in all groups, with the absence of medical workers during the first few weeks and many sick leaves that could not be covered in the first study period. In addition, there was a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), no hydroalcoholic solutions, difficult access to tests and great difficulties in sectorization. All these circumstances must have contributed to the high number of infected patients and, as a consequence, more deaths.

In contrast, NH4 had better workers ratios, which increased considerably during the peak of the pandemic, and sufficient personal protective equipment, although the distribution and application of infection prevention measures (use of equipment, sectorization, established circuits for COVID-19 patients, adequate cleaning) was irregular at first until they learned how to act and adapt it to the center itself. For this purpose, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, they received the protocol

called *Procedure of action for centers of the Regional Ministry of Social Policies, Families, Equality and Natality, against Coronavirus infection*. At this center, in collaboration with the Universidad Complutense, a complementary circuit for microbiological analysis (PCR) was implemented in March due to the fact that the laboratory at the reference hospital was not available to perform all the tests requested at the center.

Nursing home number 2 had an intermediate workers ratio and also had adequate protective measures, with correct use of these measures, assigned workers to COVID-19 zone, a significant increase in cleaning staff, as well as the possibility of early screening tests<sup>(18)</sup> for SARS-CoV-2 privately.

These circumstances have been the key to reach fewer patients with the infection and also the lowest percentage of deaths out of the total number of residents. The performance of this center can provide guidance on best practices for dealing with this disease and future outbreaks<sup>(17)</sup>.

All centers learned to apply the method of preventing transmission of the disease as can be seen in the comparison of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> period. However, recommendations such as sectorization and isolation of patients have meant that a complex individualized plan adapted to the architecture of each nursing home had to be drawn up, with the consequent unavoidable delay in the implementation of the measures. It should be borne in mind that the rooms in nursing homes, unlike those in hospitals, have a large amount of furniture, small appliances and belongings, which made it difficult to make the many changes that were indicated. This may have influenced the spread of the disease, as suggested by the results of nursing home 1, where the first case appeared early and spread before the recommendations were applied and before sectorization.

Regarding the provision of hospital drugs, prior to the beginning of the pandemic there was a limited connection between the hospital pharmacy and nursing homes 2 and 4. Collaboration was quickly extended to the rest of nursing homes, with the hospital pharmacy participating, not only in the management of requests and medicine logistics, but also in the provision of advice and pharmaceutical care, as was done by other hospital pharmacy services in our area<sup>(19)</sup>, or in those social and healthcare centers where the integration of the pharmacist is already a reality<sup>(20)</sup>.

Regarding the number of infected patients in relation to the total number of residents, NH2 with 20.83% is lower than the 30.3% described by Kimball<sup>(10)</sup> in his series, although the other three centers double the incidence, with some exceeding 50% of infected patients, taking into account the two periods. It should be noted that in this study suspected cases are counted by clinic because most of them could not be confirmed by PCR, which may overestimate the diagnosis. The calculation of infection by counting suspects has been standard practice in countries such as Canada, Ireland and Belgium, which, even at the risk of misdiagnosis, may provide a more accurate figure for COVID-19 disease mortality<sup>(21)</sup>.

The number of patients admitted to hospital from these centers varies between 16% and 46% of those infected, with a much higher percentage of suspected cases in one of the centers. These figures are somewhat lower than those reported by McMichael<sup>(22)</sup> of 56.8%. The short observation period for this data (one day of each period) and the support of the care team in facilitating treatment in nursing homes themselves may have influenced the fewer hospital referrals.

The cumulative mortality in relation to the total number of residents in each center on 4<sup>th</sup> May varied between 15.3% and 38.35%. Although

mortality among those infected was not collected, these figures suggest higher mortality in our series than in McMichael's publication<sup>(22)</sup> where 27.2% were counted. In this variable, again the lack of confirmation of infection must have influenced the figure and also, in the context of the pandemic, there may have been several fragile patients who died due to decompensation of their previous pathologies. The review by Comas-Herrera<sup>(21)</sup> shows large differences in mortality of institutionalized patients among the total number of infected patients, ranging from 58% in Norway, 51% in Belgium, 38% in France, 30% in Spain and, curiously, 0% in South Korea and Hong Kong.

In view of the data, it is possible that the results are related to the availability of human resources, but also to the haste in initiating infection prevention measures, compliance with them and the availability of early diagnostic tests, contact detection, isolation and sectorization. It is very likely that asymptomatic patients and caregivers<sup>(10)</sup> have played an important role in transmission due to the absence of diagnosis, so in the absence of repeated screening by testing, implementing universal transmission prevention strategies was the only measure that could contribute to reducing the serious consequences of the disease.

One of the limitations of the study is the fact that it did not collect the cases that appeared every day, and only had information for one day of each period for some variables. Additionally, the diagnosis may be underestimated, as diagnostic tests were not available for all suspects and at the peak of the pandemic asymptomatic people were not tested, with the consequent risk of spreading the infection to the rest of the population.

**Conclusion.** The care of institutionalized patients during the pandemic by a geriatric and preventive care team has provided advice to the residential care team on how to improve the

prevention of transmission and clinical care of the elderly. This team has observed better results in centers with adequate human and material resources, but especially in those that have carried out sufficient early diagnostic tests, which has helped them to better implement recommendations on isolation and sectorization to avoid dissemination among residents and between residents and care workers.

Continuous collaboration between a multidisciplinary hospital team and the health care team in nursing homes can improve the quality of care for institutionalized elderly people.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express special thanks to all the professionals who collaborated in improving the care of nursing home patients during the first wave of the pandemic and participated in the review of this article. Services such as Pharmacy, Laboratory, Microbiology, Traumatology, Internal Medicine, Infectious Diseases Section, Ethics Committee, Preventive Medicine, Rehabilitation, Emergency Department, and the Hospital Management, as well as professionals from Primary Care in Alcorcón, have worked in coordination with Geriatrics in the development of this work. Moreover, the authors show the translator Marta Calahorro Castro gratitude for her translation of this article.

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## Annex I

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