Competency deficits of medical and peri-medical staff in medical facilities, including new tasks associated with the COVID-19 epidemic

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Introduction: The main problems that the health sector is currently struggling with during COVID-19 pandemic are limited financial, infrastructural and, above all, human resources, with a simultaneous increase in the needs and awareness of patients.

Aim of the study: To determine deficits in the competences of medical and peri-medical staff in medical facilities, taking into account new tasks related to the COVID-19 epidemic.

Methods: The research technique used was a computer-assisted questionnaire (CAWI). The questionnaire was made available on the online research platform with a personalized link. The study was carried out in Poland in the period December 2020 - January 2021 and included medical staff and supporting medical staff, working mainly in outpatient medical entities, that is: doctors, nurses / midwives, coordinators, medical secretaries and other healthcare professionals.

Results: 131 respondents participated in the study. Women constituted 87% of the studied group. Over half of the respondents were nurses / midwives (52%). 19% of other respondents were doctors, 9% coordinators, 2% medical secretaries and 20% others, that is administrative workers, paramedics and laboratory diagnosticians.

The most frequently chosen competences that the respondents considered the most important in the situation of an epidemic were: implementation and strict adherence to the standards and rules for dealing with patients suspected of COVID-19 and suffering from COVID-19 - 42%, proper / understandable communication with the patient - 24% and proper cooperation with the rest of the facility staff for effective diagnosis and treatment - 19%. Less frequently, however, they chose the following answers: proper management of patient traffic - 8%, effective remote diagnosis and treatment of patients - 5%, and identification of stress and emotions in a patient - 2%.

The main differences related to respondents` work were experienced not directly due to the state of epidemic threat, but due to the introduction of the telemedicine service. Difficulties related to the diagnosis and treatment of patients through the telemedicine system were experienced by 1/3 of the respondents, mainly associated with communication with the patient, technical issues,
medical documentation, understanding the specifics of telemedicine services, as well as verification of the patient's identity. It was caused, among others, by lack of digital competences of both doctors / nurses and patients. The vast majority of respondents considered the quality of care through the telemedicine system to be worse than face to face. A large proportion of respondents (approx. 30%) described their competences related to providing patient-centered care through a telemedicine system much worse than face to face. Almost half of the respondents admitted that they easily reorganized their own work due to threat caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Discussion and conclusions:** The COVID-19 pandemic practically overnight forced a change in the approach to remote provision of medical services, becoming the dominant form of contact with patients in Poland. Determining the degree of match or mismatch with the competences of medical personnel may be of significant importance in the process of managing medical entities."