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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of breast cancer: A systematic review

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Objective: This review intends to clarify the relationship between the pandemic of COVID-19 and the increase in cases and in the worsening of the prognosis of breast cancer, in Brazil and in the world. **Methodology:** A systematic literature review was carried out from the PubMed database, with the descriptors: “pandemic” and “breast cancer,” with the Boolean operator: “AND,” and the filters: “full text,” with publication date 2021 and 2022, in women only, in the English language. Ten scientific articles were identified. **Results:** The COVID-19 pandemic increased existing barriers to access to screening, treatment, and emotional support services for breast cancer. Changes in health recommendations and less urgent appointments have led to a decrease in cancer screening rates, which resulted in late diagnoses and worse outcomes for patients. It is valuable to emphasize the importance of improving access to breast cancer screening services during health crises such as the pandemic, implementing safe and effective strategies to mitigate its effects. In addition, the fear and stress of contracting the virus while attending health units, on top of the delays in diagnosis and treatment faced during the crisis, negatively impacted the mental health of patients. The insecurity when dealing with a malignant neoplasm was amplified by the pandemic and resulted in an increase of this biological factor that greatly interferes with cancer prognosis. **Conclusion:** The COVID-19 pandemic imposed a drop in screening, diagnosis, and follow-up of breast cancer. The health system suffered the impact of the pandemic, leaving care for other diseases to be neglected, and patients stopped seeking health services for other morbidities, such as breast cancer. Health professionals must be aware of and must work to minimize the harm of negligence with this cancer during times of crisis, as occurred with COVID-19.

Keywords: breast cancer; pandemic; COVID-19.