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**PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF POST-CESAREAN
SURGICAL SITE INFECTION:
THE ROLE OF THE NURSE**

**PREVENÇÃO E CONTROLO DA INFEÇÃO DO LOCAL
CIRÚRGICO PÓS-CESARIANA:
O PAPEL DO ENFERMEIRO**

**PREVENCIÓN Y CONTROL DE LA INFECCIÓN
DEL SITIO QUIRÚRGICO POSTCESÁREA:
EL PAPEL DEL ENFERMERO**

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Abstract

Introduction: Surgical site infection in postpartum women who have undergone a cesarean section constitutes a significant health concern. Effective infection control requires strict adherence to aseptic principles and the administration of prophylactic antibiotics during the perioperative period. Measures include proper hand hygiene, appropriate use of personal protective equipment, and ensuring a safe hospital environment. **Objective:** To understand the role of nurses in the prevention and control of surgical site infections following cesarean delivery. **Methodology:** An integrative literature review was conducted, analyzing articles published between 2020 and 2025, focusing on the prevention and control of surgical wound infections after cesarean sections. **Results:** The role of nurses is particularly relevant in this process, as they play a crucial part in identifying risk factors, implementing preventive measures, and promoting safe and high-quality obstetric care. **Conclusion:** Nurses play a fundamental role in this dynamic, as their proactive approach is essential for identifying risk factors, implementing prevention strategies, and ensuring safe obstetric care. Their actions should be based on scientific evidence and focused on promoting the quality of care provided.

Keywords: Harm Reduction Behavior; Nurses; Prevention and Control; Surgical Wound.

Resumo

Introdução: A infecção do local cirúrgico em puérperas submetidas a cesariana constitui um problema de saúde significativo. Para um controle eficaz das infecções, é essencial garantir o cumprimento rigoroso dos princípios de assepsia e a administração de antibióticos profiláticos no período peri-operatório. Medidas incluem a correta higienização das mãos, o uso adequado de equipamentos de proteção individual e a garantia de um ambiente hospitalar seguro. **Objetivo:** Compreender o papel dos enfermeiros na prevenção e controle da infecção do local cirúrgico após cesariana. **Metodologia:** realizou-se uma revisão integrativa da literatura, com artigos publicados entre 2020 e 2025, com foco na prevenção e controle de infecção das feridas cirúrgicas após cesarianas. **Resultados:** O papel dos enfermeiros assume particular relevância neste processo, sendo fundamental que atuem de forma dinâmica na identificação de fatores de risco, na adoção de medidas preventivas e na promoção de uma assistência obstétrica segura e de qualidade. **Conclusão:** O papel dos enfermeiros revela-se fundamental, sendo imprescindível que atuem de forma dinâmica na identificação de fatores de risco, na implementação de estratégias de prevenção e na garantia de uma assistência obstétrica segura, baseada em evidência científica e na promoção da qualidade dos cuidados prestados.

Palavras-chave: Comportamento de Redução do Dano; Enfermeiros; Ferida Cirúrgica; Prevenção e Controle.

Resumen

Introducción: La infección del sitio quirúrgico en puérperas sometidas a cesárea constituye un problema de salud significativo. Para un control eficaz de las infecciones, es esencial garantizar el cumplimiento riguroso de los principios de asepsia y la administración de antibióticos profiláticos en el período perioperatorio. Las medidas incluyen la correcta higiene de manos, el uso adecuado de equipos de protección individual y la garantía de un entorno hospitalario seguro. **Objetivo:** Comprender el papel de los enfermeros en la prevención y control de la infección del sitio quirúrgico después de una cesárea. **Metodología:** Se realizó una revisión integradora de la literatura, con artículos publicados entre 2020 y 2025, centrándose en la prevención y control de la infección de heridas quirúrgicas después de cesáreas. **Resultados:** El papel de los enfermeros adquiere especial relevancia en este proceso, siendo fundamental que actúen de manera dinámica en la identificación de factores de riesgo, la adopción de medidas preventivas y la promoción de una atención obstétrica segura y de calidad. **Conclusión:** El rol de los enfermeros es fundamental en esta dinámica, siendo imprescindible que actúen de forma activa en la identificación de factores de riesgo, la implementación de estrategias de prevención y la garantía de una atención obstétrica segura, basada en evidencia científica y en la promoción de la calidad de los cuidados prestados.

Descriptores: Comportamiento de Reducción del Dano; Enfermeros; Herida Quirúrgica; Prevención y Control.

Introduction

Surgical site infection in postpartum women undergoing cesarean section constitutes a significant health problem in the obstetric context⁽¹⁾. This puerperal infection is among the four main complications associated with childbirth and the puerperium⁽²⁾. Nurses play a fundamental role in promoting health, preventing and detecting puerperal infections early, particularly surgical site infections after cesarean section⁽¹⁾.

For effective infection control, it is essential to ensure strict adherence to aseptic principles and the administration of prophylactic antibiotics in the perioperative period⁽³⁾. Preventive measures for the reduction and control of surgical site infection in cesarean section include proper hand hygiene, appropriate use of personal protective equipment and ensuring a safe hospital environment⁽¹⁾. It is essential that health-care professionals carefully follow the established guidelines for the prevention and control of surgical wound infections, namely strict adherence to aseptic and sterilization standards in the operating room⁽³⁾.

Health education for pregnant and postpartum women plays a fundamental role in the prevention of infections. The nurses are responsible for developing educational actions that promote the timely recognition of the signs and symptoms of surgical wound infection after cesarean section, as well as the adoption of preventive measures⁽⁴⁾.

Training nurses on the subject and applying updated guidelines are fundamental strategies to ensure safe and effective care⁽⁵⁾. The role of nurses is particularly relevant in this process, and it is essential that they act dynamically in identifying risk factors, adopting preventive measures, and promoting safe and high-quality obstetric care⁽¹⁾.

Objective

This investigation aims to understand the role of nurses in the prevention and control of surgical site infection after cesarean section.

Methodology

Ethical aspects

No opinion was requested from the ethics committee as this is a secondary study. Bibliographic referencing was carried out in accordance with the norms of good academic and scientific practices. In formulating the problem, the principles of objectivity, precision, and clarity were safeguarded, so that the results would contribute to the knowledge about infection control in the postoperative period of cesarean sections. The analysis of data from the selected studies was developed according to the principle of respect for the results achieved in those investigations and by those researchers.

Type of study

The type of study used was an integrative literature review on the topic: prevention and control of infection in cesarean sections. This methodology allows for a synthesis of results and a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the subject. The six recommended steps were used:

1. Identification of the topic and selection of the hypothesis or research question for the elaboration of the integrative review;
2. Establishment of criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies/sampling or literature search;
3. Definition of the information to be extracted from the selected studies/categorization of studies;
4. Evaluation of the studies included in the integrative review;
5. Interpretation of the results;
6. Presentation of the review/synthesis of knowledge⁽⁶⁾.

Methodological procedures

According to the objective described above, which served as a guiding basis for the Integrative Literature Review, a research question was formulated using

the mnemonic PIO, where (P) is the target population, (I) is the type of intervention, and (O) is the outcome. Based on this structure, the following guiding question was developed: How does the nurse act (Intervention) in the prevention and control of the surgical wound after cesarean section (Outcomes) in postpartum women (Population)? With the PIO question developed, data collection on the subject under study followed.

A search for scientific articles was conducted using the electronic platform in the health databases: EBSCOhost, Virtual Health Library (VHL), and Google Scholar. Scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025 were searched using the following descriptors: “harm reduction behavior”; “prevention and control”; “nurses”; “surgical wound”. The inclusion criteria were defined as follows: articles on the prevention and control of surgical wound infection in the postpartum period, available in full text, published in Portuguese, English, and French. Exclusion criteria were: paid articles, articles addressing surgical wounds in other healthcare contexts, and publications dated before 2019. These criteria yielded 60 articles; after removing duplicates, 30 remained for analysis. After reading the title and abstract, and when the title and abstract were insufficient, the full text of the article was read, resulting in 12 articles, as shown in the flowchart in Figure 1. The articles that best addressed the chosen topic to achieve the research objective were selected. The chosen articles were those that focused on studies about the role of nurses in the prevention and control of surgical wound infection after cesarean section.

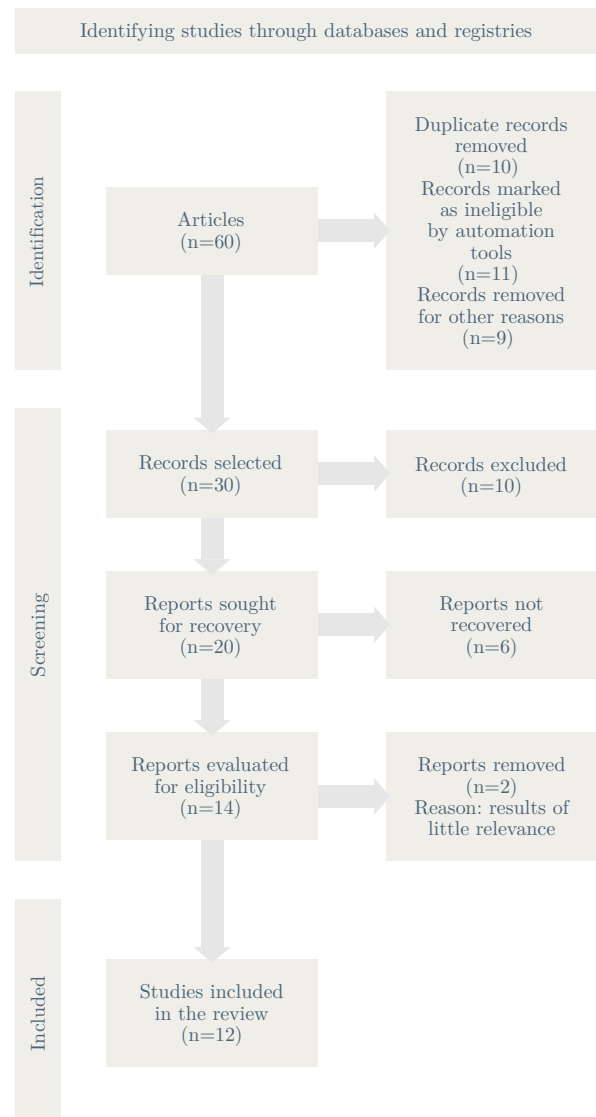


Figure 1: Article selection process according to the PRISMA model 2020 flowchart.

Results Achieved

The results of the literature review will be analyzed in order to compare the selected studies, followed by a discussion based on thematic content analysis. After analyzing the 12 articles, the results are presented in Table 1 to facilitate their interpretation.

Table 1: Data extracted from the analyzed articles.

Authors (Year)	Study Type	Objectives	Results/Conclusion
Ouedraogo, E. 2024.	Cross-sectional, descriptive, and analytical study.	To study the epidemiological, clinical, and evolutionary aspects of surgical site infection following emergency cesarean section at the Bogodogo University Hospital Center.	Surgical infections following cesarean sections are very frequent at the Bogodogo University Hospital Center. It is concluded that preventing these infections requires adherence to skin asepsis rules and compliance with sterilization standards in the operating room, thus reinforcing the need for an infection prevention control committee.
De Souza, I; De Oliveira, L.; De Souza, P.; Nascimento, R.; Moreira, V.; Pereira, P. 2024.	Integrative Literature Review.	To analyze nursing care in the context of prevention and control of puerperal infection.	Puerperal infections in the postpartum period are characterized as a serious health problem. This study highlights the importance of hand hygiene, the use of personal protective equipment, and the maintenance of a clean and sterile environment. In this sense, the role of nurses is fundamental, since they are direct agents in the prevention of infections during childbirth, the puerperium, and the postpartum period.
Nunes, A; Fontinele, A.; Lira, E.; Gedeon, G.; Da Costa, L.; Prado, N.; Eleotério, R. 2024.	Integrative Literature Review.	To identify the main risk factors for puerperal infection and the importance of humanized nursing care.	The risk factors for puerperal infection identified are associated with the occurrence of meconium in the amniotic fluid, the number of vaginal examinations, the duration of labor, premature births before 32 weeks, lack of prenatal care, and lack of hygiene during labor and postpartum. This study highlighted that nurses play a fundamental role in promoting health, preventing, and detecting puerperal infections early.
Oliveira, J.; De Assis, J.; Do Nascimento, B.; De Sousa, L.; Do Nascimento, A.; Liebel, V.; Pez, K.; Pellin, E.; Lisboa, N.; Dos Santos, L.; Pontes, E.; Do Nascimento, I. 2023.	Integrative Literature Review.	To highlight measures for the care, prevention, and control of puerperal infection.	The study concludes that measures to prevent and control puerperal infection should be implemented early through health education initiatives on the signs of infection, as well as on the importance of intimate hygiene for women during childbirth and the postpartum period. Puerperal infection is a healthcare-associated infection, therefore patient safety protocols emphasize hand hygiene as the primary means of prevention.
Santos, R.; Lago, D. 2022.	Systematic Literature Review.	To analyze the main characteristics related to puerperal infection in women undergoing cesarean section.	Risk factors for puerperal infection include modifiable and non-modifiable characteristics. Socioeconomic factors, while unchangeable, can guide prenatal prevention strategies, such as increased social support and active surveillance. Clinical factors, such as obesity, are controllable, and controlling them reduces the risk of associated comorbidities. Adherence to obstetric protocols during childbirth helps to decrease the risk of infection.
Santos, E.; Pinheiro, S.; De Almeida, M.; Da Silva, T.; Da Silva, D.; Da Silva, L. 2022.	Integrative Literature Review.	To investigate the association between wound infection after cesarean section and nursing care.	This study revealed that surgical wound infection after cesarean section is related to pre-, during, and postpartum care. It highlighted the need for training nurses on this topic and the implementation of action protocols to standardize postpartum care for women. These women require constant monitoring and guidance regarding the necessary care for the surgical wound after cesarean section.
Da Câmara, M.; Felix, C.; Corgozinho, M. 2022.	Integrative Literature Review.	To describe the theoretical profile of publications on nursing in the context of surgical wound infection.	Infection prevention requires a multifactorial approach, with nurses considered the primary professionals in providing perioperative care necessary to minimize infection risks. This reinforces proper hand hygiene, adherence to aseptic principles, the use of materials designed to prevent accidents with biological resources, and the use of perioperative prophylactic antibiotics. Healthcare professionals should be aware of updated guidelines for the prevention and control of surgical wound infections.
Araújo, J.; Abreu, W.; Silva, J. 2022.	Integrative and descriptive literature review.	To analyze the role of the nurse in identifying surgical site infection, as well as in the care of the surgical wound in postpartum women.	The study highlighted that nursing care for postpartum women with surgical site infections is essential, as nurses play a role in prevention and risk reduction. It is fundamental that nurses maintain complete nursing records for a correct and comprehensive assessment of maternal health.
De Andrade, A.; Teles, W.; Da Silva, M.; Dos Santos, F.; Gonzaga, G.; Fonseca, R.; Torres, R.; Debbo, A.; Azevedo, M.; Silva, M.; Barros, A.; Junior, P.; Hora, A.; Calasans, T. 2021.	Integrative review, of an analytical and retrospective nature, with a qualitative approach.	To evaluate the role of the nurse in the prevention of puerperal infection associated with cesarean section.	This study concludes that there are risk factors that are crucial for puerperal infection in cesarean sections, such as obesity and surgery time. It reinforces the importance of the nurse, as they are responsible for managing risks, reporting adverse events, and, most importantly, acting to prevent and reduce infections in the hospital setting.
Da Cunha, B. 2021.	Integrative literature review.	To identify a set of perioperative strategies and surgical techniques that reduce the risk of surgical site infection after cesarean section.	The study indicated that the use of chlorhexidine for abdominal preparation, povidone-iodine solution for vaginal preparation, and broad-spectrum antibiotics before the procedure, as well as booster antibiotic therapy during prolonged surgery or surgery with excessive blood loss, are strategies and techniques to reduce the risk of surgical site infection after cesarean section. Intraoperatively, the following were advised: performing a low transverse skin incision; spontaneous placental extraction with gentle traction of the umbilical cord and uterine massage; closure of the subcutaneous space with tissue larger than two centimeters; and the use of subcuticular sutures.
Mota, A.; Castilho, A.; Martins, M. 2021.	Descriptive Study.	To characterize the perioperative nurses' perception of patient safety in the operating room. Participants: Perioperative nurses working in the operating room of hospitals within the National Health Service.	Most patient safety dimensions have a low level of implementation, particularly those related to audits. Only the dimensions related to good practices in the unambiguous identification of patients and the prevention and control of infection and antimicrobial resistance show a high level of implementation. These results indicate opportunities for improvement in most patient safety dimensions in the operating room.
Petrucio, W.; Nogueira, V.; Gentil, Y.; Dos Santos, A.; Viana, J. 2021.	Observational study.	To describe the epidemiological and microbiological profile of postpartum women diagnosed with infection after cesarean section, characterizing surgical site infections and their treatment.	The most common profile of women who develop surgical site infections after a cesarean section is characterized by low educational attainment. Among the most frequently associated risk factors are obesity and the absence of prophylactic antibiotic therapy. Knowledge of the epidemiological and microbiological characteristics can help in planning care to minimize cases of surgical site infection and its consequences. Thus, the study demonstrated evidence that surgical site infection after cesarean section stems from factors related to the host, pregnancy/intrapartum, and the surgical procedure.
De Souza, K.; Serrano, S. 2020.	Exploratory and qualitative study.	To learn about nurses' experiences regarding their practices in preventing surgical site infections. Participants: Nurses.	There was concern regarding minimizing the risk of surgical site infection in patients through the adoption of preventive actions, such as hand hygiene, use of personal protective equipment, wound treatment with aseptic technique, and providing patient education on self-care, particularly hygiene. The nurse plays an important role in ensuring patient safety, based on technical and scientific knowledge in their actions.

Discussion

The postpartum period, which corresponds to the period after childbirth, is an essential and transformative phase in a woman's life. During this cycle, the body undergoes fundamental physiological and hormonal changes for its recovery. This moment is crucial for monitoring the evolution of maternal recovery and ensuring her well-being⁽⁷⁾. One of the main reasons for concern in the postpartum period is related to the surgical wound after a dystocic delivery by cesarean section⁽²⁾.

From the analysis of the selected articles and the synthesis of their results, it becomes evident that surgical site infection in postpartum women undergoing cesarean section constitutes a significant health problem in the obstetric context⁽¹⁾.

As with any surgical intervention, cesarean section can be associated with various complications, with surgical wound infection being one of the possible occurrences. This puerperal infection is among the four main complications associated with childbirth and the postpartum period, being an important cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide, mainly in less developed countries, and responsible for 10% of global maternal deaths⁽²⁾. The results obtained in the studies corroborate recent scientific evidence, which highlights the importance of a preventive and multidisciplinary approach to minimize the risks associated with surgical wound infection after cesarean section⁽³⁾.

Nurses play a fundamental role in promoting health, preventing and detecting puerperal infections early, particularly surgical site infections after cesarean section¹. They fulfill a central function in perioperative care, given their close and continuous contact with postpartum women. In this way, they assume an essential role in minimizing the risks of infection during childbirth, the puerperium and the postpartum period⁽³⁾.

Surgical wound infection in postpartum women undergoing cesarean section is considered a healthcare-associated infection, and patient safety protocols emphasize hand hygiene as the main preventive measure⁽⁸⁾. Moreover, for effective infection control, it is

essential to ensure strict adherence to aseptic principles and the administration of prophylactic antibiotics in the perioperative period⁽³⁾. Complementing this approach, studies indicate that the use of antiseptic substances, such as Chlorhexidine in abdominal preparation and Iodopovidone solution in vaginal preparation, combined with prophylactic antibiotic therapy⁽⁹⁾, constitutes an effective strategy to reduce the risk of surgical wound infection⁽¹⁰⁾.

The risk factors associated with puerperal infection encompass both modifiable and non-modifiable aspects⁽⁵⁾. The occurrence of meconium in the amniotic fluid, the high number of vaginal examinations, prolonged labor, premature births, lack of prenatal care, lack of hygiene during childbirth and postpartum are considered risk factors that increase women's vulnerability to developing puerperal infections⁽¹¹⁾. These results are corroborated by other studies⁽⁵⁾, which suggest that socioeconomic factors, such as low maternal education⁽⁹⁾, although they cannot be modified, can guide preventive strategies in the prenatal period, such as greater social support and active surveillance of pregnant women in vulnerable situations. Furthermore, clinical risk factors, such as obesity, are determinants for puerperal infection, however they are controllable and their control reduces the risk of associated comorbidities^(5,12).

Preventive measures for reducing and controlling surgical site infection in cesarean sections include proper hand hygiene, appropriate use of personal protective equipment, and ensuring a safe hospital environment⁽¹⁾. It is essential that healthcare professionals carefully follow the established guidelines for the prevention and control of surgical wound infections⁽³⁾, namely strict compliance with asepsis and sterilization standards in the operating room. In addition, the importance of a complete and systematic nursing record of the care provided to pregnant and postpartum women is highlighted, allowing for a more effective assessment of maternal health and enabling early intervention in the event of suspected infection or identification of risk factors⁽¹³⁾.

Health education for pregnant and postpartum women plays a fundamental role in the prevention of infections, being an essential strategy to be imple-

mented early. Nurses are responsible for developing educational actions that promote the timely recognition of the signs and symptoms of cesarean surgical wound infection, as well as the adoption of preventive measures. Among these, the importance of adequate intimate hygiene during childbirth and the postpartum period stands out, thus contributing to the reduction of the risk of infectious complications⁽⁸⁾. Other studies reinforce this perspective, highlighting that adequate guidance on self-care and hygiene in the postoperative period is an essential strategy in reducing infection rates⁽¹⁾.

Adherence to safety protocols and the control of healthcare-associated infections are crucial for improving maternal outcomes⁽⁴⁾, as such, the existence of infection control and prevention committees, responsible for ensuring the implementation and proper compliance with these standards, becomes fundamental⁽¹⁴⁾. However, studies indicate that, despite the existence of good practices in patient identification and infection control, weaknesses persist in the implementation of audits and in the full compliance with hospital guidelines. In addition, the implementation of specific action protocols for postpartum care can contribute to the standardization of care and the reduction of infection rates. Training nurses on the subject and applying updated guidelines are fundamental strategies to ensure safe and effective care⁽⁵⁾.

Knowledge of epidemiological and microbiological characteristics can help in planning care to reduce cases of surgical site infection and its consequences. Studies indicate that surgical site infection after cesarean section stems from factors related to the host, pregnancy/intrapartum, and the surgical procedure⁽⁹⁾.

Thus, the results obtained confirm that the incidence of surgical site infections after cesarean section can be reduced through an integrated approach, which includes the training of health professionals, the implementation of rigorous protocols, and educational actions directed at pregnant and postpartum women⁽²⁾. The role of nurses is particularly relevant in this process, and it is essential that they act dynamically in identifying risk factors, adopting preventive measures, and promoting safe and quality obstetric care, supported by technical and scientific knowledge⁽¹⁾.

Study Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to the selection of bibliographic sources used. Only articles freely available online were included, which may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant studies requiring paid access. This restriction may have affected the diversity and representativeness of the analyzed works, thus limiting the generalization of the results. Furthermore, the research was conducted only in Portuguese and French, which may have led to the exclusion of significant studies published in other languages, restricting the scope of the analyzed data.

Contributions for Nursing

This Integrative Literature Review provides a reflection on the importance of the role of nurses in the prevention and control of surgical site infection after cesarean section. The analysis of the studies reinforces that the rigorous implementation of clinical protocols, the continuous training of healthcare professionals, and health education for pregnant and postpartum women are essential strategies to reduce the incidence of these infections. Furthermore, the relevance of systematic nursing documentation of care provided is highlighted, allowing for more efficient monitoring and early detection of complications. This review also points to the need for individualized care, considering risk factors such as obesity, lack of prenatal care, and unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, which reinforces the importance of a humanized and woman-centered approach. The implementation of infection control and prevention committees, as well as continuous audits to ensure compliance with institutional standards, emerges as an essential strategy for improving obstetric care. Thus, the results of this review confirm that the active and qualified performance of nurses, combined with preventive and educational measures, is crucial for reducing puerperal infections and promoting safer and more effective obstetric care.

Final Thoughts

Surgical site infection in women undergoing cesarean section represents a significant problem in maternal health, standing out as one of the main complications associated with childbirth and the postpartum period. Its incidence reinforces the need for effective prevention and control strategies, which involve not only the rigorous implementation of clinical protocols, but also the continuous training of health professionals, as well as the education of pregnant and postpartum women.

The literature analyzed shows that nurses play a central role in this process, given their proximity to postpartum women and their responsibility in monitoring, early detection and guidance on postoperative care. Thus, adherence to safety protocols, compliance with asepsis standards and the appropriate use of prophylactic antibiotics are fundamental measures for reducing the risk of puerperal infection. In addition, the importance of systematic nursing documentation of the care provided is highlighted, allowing for more efficient monitoring of the woman's clinical evolution.

Another essential aspect in the prevention of puerperal infections is health education, which should begin early in the prenatal period. Teaching and empowering pregnant women about proper hygiene practices, maternal health care to follow, and warning signs and symptoms of infections are strategies that contribute to reducing morbidity and mortality. Studies indicate that risk factors such as obesity, lack of adequate prenatal care, and unfavorable socioeconomic conditions increase women's vulnerability to infectious complications, reinforcing the need for individualized and humanized care.

Despite the existence of well-established guidelines for the control of hospital infections, challenges persist in their practical implementation, particularly with regard to conducting audits and fully complying with institutional standards. Thus, the implementation and rigorous compliance with infection control and prevention committees becomes essential, ensuring a more effective and sustained approach to improving obstetric care.

In this way, the results of this study confirm that the incidence of surgical site infections after cesarean section can be minimized through an integrated approach, combining rigorous preventive measures, professional training, and educational actions for pregnant and postpartum women. The role of nurses is fundamental in this dynamic, and it is essential that they act dynamically in identifying risk factors, implementing prevention strategies, and ensuring safe obstetric care based on scientific evidence and promoting the quality of care provided.

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