

Construction of a playful nurse uniform from the child's perspective: a methodological study

Construção de uniforme lúdico de enfermeira na perspectiva da criança: estudo metodológico
Diseño de un uniforme de enfermería lúdico desde la perspectiva infantil: un estudio metodológico

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Abstract

Objective: To construct a playful uniform based on children's imagery, aiming to reduce childhood anxiety in clinical settings. **Method:** A methodological study with a technological innovation approach, focused on the creation of an evidence-based care product. An integrative literature review was conducted in LILACS, BDENF, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar databases, using the descriptors "uniform," "nurse," and "child," identifying 11 studies. The sketch design stage was guided by the Child Drawing: Hospital Manual (CD:H) technique, with drawings produced by children with very low, low, and medium levels of anxiety. **Results:** 36 drawings were selected, seven of which presented recurring elements, such as human figures, nature, hospital equipment, and predominant colors: blue, green, yellow, and orange. From this, a uniform prototype was developed consisting of a white shirt with prints of the drawings. The analysis of the drawings revealed the importance of integrating visual elements significant to children in the clinical environment. The color blue, frequently associated with tranquility, showed potential for reducing anxiety, reinforcing its choice in the uniform design. **Conclusion:** Uniforms based on children's imagery can constitute an innovative strategy for promoting humanized care, reducing anxiety, and valuing care practices focused on the child.

Descriptors: Clothing; Nurses; Child.

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Whats is already known on this?

Traditional uniforms can increase childhood anxiety; colorful and playful uniforms are well-known strategies for making the hospital environment more welcoming and reducing fear.

What this study adds?

It features a uniform designed with drawings made by the children themselves, reinforcing humanized and child-centered care, reducing anxiety, and promoting a positive bond in the hospital setting.



How to cite this article: Silva CSC, Sousa LM, Alves MEFG, Matias MCS, Macêdo MPS, Oliveira JD. Construction of a playful nurse uniform from the child's perspective: a methodological study. Rev. enferm. UFPI. [internet] 2025 [Cited: ano mês abreviado dia];14:e6744. DOI: 10.26694/reufpi.v14i1.6744

Resumo

Objetivo: Construir um uniforme lúdico com base na imagética da criança, visando à redução da ansiedade infantil em contextos clínicos. **Método:** Estudo metodológico com abordagem de inovação tecnológica, voltado à criação de um produto assistencial baseado em evidências. Realizou-se uma revisão integrativa da literatura nas bases de dados LILACS, BDENF, MEDLINE e Google Acadêmico, com os descritores "uniforme", "enfermeira" e "criança", tendo sido identificados 11 estudos. A etapa de construção dos croquis foi guiada pela técnica Child Drawing: Hospital Manual (CD:H), com desenhos produzidos por crianças com níveis de ansiedade muito baixos, baixos e médios. **Resultados:** Foram selecionados 36 desenhos, dos quais sete apresentaram elementos recorrentes, como figuras humanas, natureza, equipamentos hospitalares e cores predominantes: azul, verde, amarelo e laranja. A partir disso, elaborou-se um protótipo de uniforme composto por uma camisa branca com estampas dos desenhos. A análise dos desenhos revelou a importância de integrar elementos visuais significativos para as crianças no ambiente clínico. A cor azul, frequentemente associada à tranquilidade, demonstrou potencial para reduzir a ansiedade, reforçando sua escolha no design do uniforme. **Conclusão:** Uniformes pautados na imagética da criança podem constituir-se uma estratégia inovadora para a promoção do cuidado humanizado, a diminuição da ansiedade e a valorização de práticas assistenciais voltadas à criança.

Descritores: Vestuário; Enfermeiras e Enfermeiros; Criança.

Resumen

Objetivo: Diseñar un uniforme lúdico basado en la imaginación infantil, con el fin de reducir la ansiedad en entornos clínicos. **Método:** Estudio metodológico con enfoque en innovación tecnológica, centrado en la creación de un producto de atención basado en la evidencia. Se realizó una revisión bibliográfica integrativa en las bases de datos LILACS, BDENF, MEDLINE y Google Scholar, utilizando los descriptores "uniforme", "enfermera" y "niño", identificando 11 estudios. La etapa de bocetos se guió por la técnica del Manual de Dibujo Infantil para Hospitales (CD:H), con dibujos realizados por niños con niveles de ansiedad muy bajos, bajos y medios. **Resultados:** Se seleccionaron 36 dibujos, de los cuales siete presentaban elementos recurrentes, como figuras humanas, naturaleza, equipamiento hospitalario y colores predominantes: azul, verde, amarillo y naranja. A partir de estos, se desarrolló un prototipo de uniforme, consistente en una camisa blanca con estampados de los dibujos. El análisis de los dibujos reveló la importancia de integrar elementos visuales significativos para los niños en el entorno clínico. El color azul, frecuentemente asociado con la tranquilidad, demostró potencial para reducir la ansiedad, lo que refuerza su elección en el diseño del uniforme. **Conclusión:** Los uniformes basados en imágenes centradas en el niño pueden constituir una estrategia innovadora para promover una atención humanizada, reducir la ansiedad y valorar las prácticas de atención centradas en el niño.

Descriptores: Vestimenta; Enfermeras y enfermeros; Niño.

INTRODUCTION

Communication between nurses and children predominantly occurs through non-verbal means, considering the specificities of child development and the unique forms of expression of this age group. Unlike adults, whose communication is primarily based on verbal language, children attribute meanings and express emotions through visual, bodily, and playful elements, such as drawings, games, gestures, and symbolic interactions.⁽¹⁾

In this context, healthcare professionals' clothing emerges as a relevant non-verbal component, as it transmits messages, influences perceptions, and impacts the child's experience during care. The uniform, in addition to representing professional identity, carries symbolic dimensions that can reinforce or mitigate feelings of fear, anxiety, and stress, especially in hospital environments, where the child experiences potentially threatening situations.⁽²⁾

Studies indicate that a child's initial contact with healthcare professionals in traditional attire, especially white, tends to trigger behaviors of refusal, crying, aggression, and seeking attachment figures, such as parents, reinforcing the association between the uniform and painful or invasive experiences.⁽³⁻⁴⁾ In response to this problem, the empirical use of more colorful and playful uniforms has been observed, incorporating elements from the children's universe, contributing to making the environment more welcoming and reducing resistance to care.⁽⁴⁾

However, existing proposals are mostly based on aesthetics created by adults, with images derived from cartoons or standardized illustrations, which may not fully reflect the perception and genuine characteristics of children. Thus, the incorporation of children's imagery, constructed from the child's own perspective, emerges as an innovative and child-centered strategy, respecting their worldview, colors, shapes, and organization of space.

Given this context, this study aimed to design a playful nursing uniform based on children's imagery, seeking, from this perspective, to contribute to the humanization of care, reduce anxiety levels, and promote a more empathetic and welcoming relationship between the child and the nursing team.

METHODS

This is a methodological study with a technological innovation approach, developed with the objective of constructing a playful nursing uniform based on the child's perspective. This type of research is characterized by the development and improvement of technologies or instruments, based on theoretical, empirical, and analytical foundations.⁽⁵⁾

This study encompassed the product construction stage, included in the theoretical pole of the adopted methodological framework. This stage comprised two main phases: an integrative literature review and the construction of the uniform sketches.

In the integrative review, the aim was to identify scientific evidence related to the constructs "child," "anxiety," and "nursing uniform." Searches were conducted between June and September 2022, using the LILACS, BDENF, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar databases, with the support of the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS/MeSH) platform. The descriptors used were "Child," "Nurse," and "Uniform," combined by the Boolean operator AND. Articles available in full text, in Portuguese, English, or Spanish, without time restriction, were included. The analysis followed five stages⁽⁶⁾: problem identification, literature review, data evaluation, results analysis, and presentation.

In the data evaluation stage, the articles were analyzed by two independent reviewers, using a standardized instrument for extracting information, considering methodological design, location of the study, year of publication, generated data, and level of scientific evidence.⁽⁷⁾

The sketch construction stage was carried out in three moments: a) selection of directed drawings; b) choice of graphic elements; c) elaboration of the uniform sketches. The Child Drawing: Hospital Manual (CD:H), a validated instrument that allows the assessment of the child's anxiety level from the analysis of directed drawings, was used as a methodological strategy.⁽⁸⁾

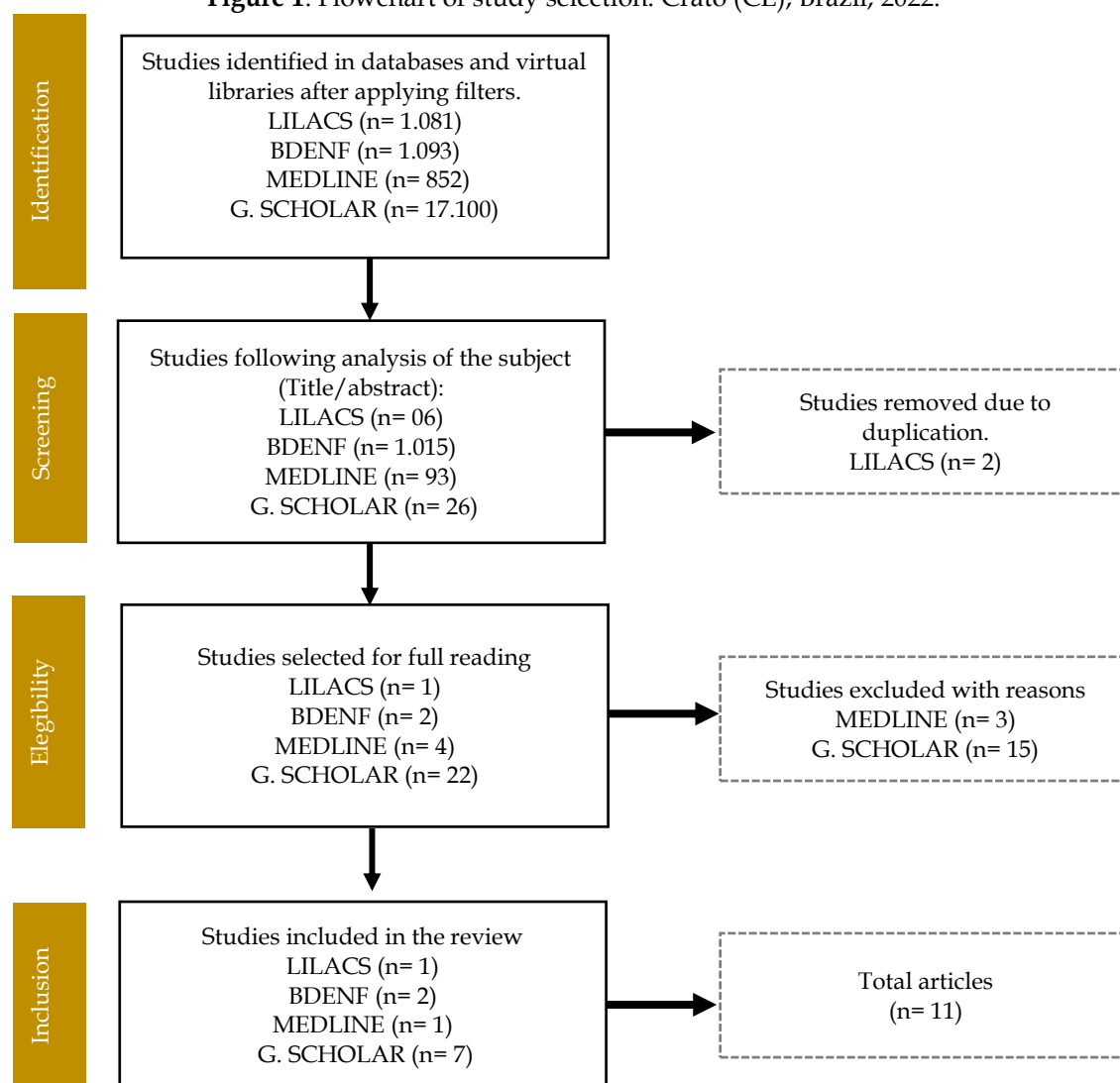
Thirty-six drawings from a pre-existing database were analyzed, selecting those with anxiety scores classified as very low, low, and medium, according to the CD:H criteria. The selection prioritized drawings containing human figures, elements of nature, windows, and hospital equipment, also observing the predominant colors - blue, green, yellow, and orange.

Based on the selection, the elements were graphically organized to compose the sketches, following the children's visual logic, considering the uniform as an extension of the drawing support (sheet of paper). A prototype of a white shirt with a print of the selected drawings and trousers in the identified predominant colors was developed. Among the four sketches developed, the model with a predominance of blue was selected for validation, as it is associated with lower levels of childhood anxiety, according to the criteria established by the CD:H.

Study approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the *Universidade Regional do Cariri* (URCA), Opinion No. 6,889,094, Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Review (CAAE) 77426923.5.0000.5055.

RESULTS

The integrative literature review resulted in the identification of 11 articles addressing the topic of nursing uniforms in pediatric settings and their relationship to children's perception and anxiety levels. The searches, conducted in the LILACS, BDENF, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar databases, totaled 20,126 initial records, of which, after applying the eligibility criteria, 11 studies remained and were included in the final analysis (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Flowchart of study selection. Crato (CE), Brazil, 2022.

Source: Prepared by the authors - Crato (CE), Brazil (2022).

Of these studies, the majority were conducted in countries such as Brazil, Turkey, the United States, Italy, Iran, Germany, Canada, and Indonesia, which highlights the predominance of international research on the topic. Regarding the methodological design, a predominance of qualitative studies was observed (n=6), followed by one mixed qualitative-quantitative study and three studies whose design was not clearly reported. All articles were classified as level 4 evidence (Chart 1).⁽⁷⁾

Chart 1. Characterization of the primary studies analyzed. Crato (CE), Brazil, 2022.

Author/Year	Journal/Database or virtual library	Location	Methodological Design	Level of Evidence
Yoshida, Esposito, & Miot, 2020 ⁽⁹⁾	LILACS	Brazil	Descriptive, qualitative, prospective, 16 tissues, data collection	Level 4
Aperibense et al., 2018 ⁽¹⁰⁾	BDENF	Brazil, Canada	Descriptive, retrospective, qualitative, students/teachers of EEAN, interview	Level 4
Almeida et al., 2017 ⁽¹¹⁾	BDENF	Brazil	Descriptive, retrospective, qualitative, EEHB students, 10 interviews	Level 4
Sanna et al., 2020 ⁽⁴⁾	MEDLINE	Italy	Observational study, descriptive, qualitative, children with parental guidance, interview	Level 4
Çalbayram Altundang, & Aydın, 2017 ⁽¹²⁾	GOOGLE SCHOLAR	Turkey	Descriptive, qualitative and quantitative research, children (six years old), hospitalized, method-design	Level 4

Boztepe & Çicar, 2017 ⁽¹³⁾	GOOGLE SCHOLAR	Turkey	Descriptive, cross-sectional method, questionnaire - 130 children	Level 4
Albert et al., 2008 ⁽¹⁴⁾	GOOGLE SCHOLAR	United States	Sample of 499 patients and visitors	Level 4
Lestari, Wanda, & Hayati, 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁾	GOOGLE SCHOLAR	Indonesia	Descriptive study, 57 children (three to six years old)	Level 4
Wocial et al., 2010 ⁽¹⁶⁾	GOOGLE SCHOLAR	United States	Cross-sectional, prospective and correlational design, evaluates feelings and emotions	Level 4
Roohafza et al., 2009 ⁽¹⁷⁾	GOOGLE SCHOLAR	Iran	Descriptive, 92 children (aged seven to 15), hospitalized (three to five days), anxiety level analysis	Level 4
Kuster, Krumhuber, & Hess, 2019 ⁽¹⁸⁾	GOOGLE SCHOLAR	Germany	Descriptive study, sample of images with clothing, positive reactions	Level 4

Source: Prepared by the authors (2022).

In the sketch construction phase, 36 directed drawings, obtained using the Child Drawing: Hospital Manual (CD:H) technique, were analyzed. Of these, seven drawings showed scores corresponding to low anxiety and 25 to medium anxiety, with those with scores above average being excluded. Thus, 32 drawings were considered eligible for selection (Chart 2).

Chart 2. Main information collected from the 11 articles selected for review, Crato (CE), Brazil, 2022.

<i>Article</i>	<i>Uniform information</i>	<i>Use in this research</i>
Yoshida, Esposito, Miot, 2020 ⁽⁹⁾	UVB, UVA, and visible light protection technology, provided by different types of fabric, thickness, and colors, aimed at photoprotection.	Pay attention to the use of materials with UVA and UVB protection and photoprotective properties, preferably in light colors.
Aperibense et al., 2018 ⁽¹⁰⁾	The use of the uniform as a strategy for building the professional identity of nurses graduated from the Anna Nery School of Nursing, highlighting its historical value in the development of the profession.	The professional identity of the nurse in the past.
Almeida et al., 2017 ⁽¹¹⁾	Transformations in the clothing of students at the Hermantina Beraldo School of Nursing (EEHB) and their relationship with the construction of the professional identity of nurses.	The professional identity of the nurse in the past.
Sanna et al., 2020 ⁽⁴⁾	Colorful and decorated uniforms reflect originality, with terms of particular moral, intellectual, and professional value, and which children show a clear preference for.	Wearing colored uniforms.
Çalbayram, Altundang, Aydin, 2017 ⁽¹²⁾	The use of drawing as a resource to investigate children's perception of healthcare professionals and the hospital environment, establishing itself as a new coping strategy that promotes adherence to hospitalization.	Child-centered care.
Boztepe, Çicar, 2017 ⁽¹³⁾	Children's perception of the hospital environment and the image of nurses.	Child-centered care.
Albert et al., 2008 ⁽¹⁴⁾	The uniform is recognized as a symbol of professional, influencing the confidence and satisfaction of patients and visitors, varying according to age group.	The professional identity of the nurse in the past.
Lestari, Wanda, Hayati, 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁾	Evaluation of the effectiveness of colorful nurses' uniforms as a distraction strategy during painful procedures.	Wearing colored uniforms.
Wocial et al., 2010 ⁽¹⁶⁾	Children show positive reactions to nurses' colorful uniforms while manifesting negative reactions to traditional (white) clothing.	Wearing colored uniforms.
Roohafza et al., 2009 ⁽¹⁷⁾	Nurses play an important role in children's anxiety levels during hospitalization due to their direct contact with children, especially through nonverbal aspects such as clothing, which influence the quality of the child-nurse relationship.	Child-centered care.

Kuster, Krumhuber, Hess, 2019 ⁽¹⁸⁾	Effects of clothing, posture, and impacts on children's perceptions of nursing professionals.	The impact of the uniform.
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Source: Prepared by the authors (2022).

Priority was given to drawings that contained elements such as human figures, elements of nature (sun, clouds, flowers), windows, and hospital equipment, in addition to the predominance of the colors blue, green, yellow, and orange. These elements served as the basis for the development of the sketches, which were divided into four versions, differentiated by the predominant colors blue, pink, yellow, and black (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Children's drawings containing predominantly human figures, nature (sun and clouds), and the use of soft colors. Crato (CE), Brazil, 2022.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2022).

For the final uniform design, a standard white shirt printed with the selected designs and colored pants corresponding to each sketch were chosen. The sketch with a predominance of blue was selected for validation, given its potential to reduce levels of childhood anxiety, as indicated by the CD:H criteria (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Prototype of the playful uniform for nurses. Crato (CE), Brazil, 2022.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2022).

Figure 3 shows the prototype that embodies the proposal based on children's imagery, featuring a white shirt with prints of the selected drawings and blue pants, a color associated with reducing anxiety. This composition expresses the intention of child-centered care by incorporating visual elements that are relevant from a child's perspective. The selection of images and colors resulted from an evidence-based methodological process, rather than random choices.

DISCUSSION

This study significantly contributes to understanding the importance of the nursing uniform in the relationship with hospitalized children, highlighting its impact on anxiety levels and the quality of non-verbal communication. The predominance of qualitative studies and level 4 evidence found in the integrative review corroborates the complexity of the topic and the need for methodological deepening in the area, reinforcing that children's perceptions demand sensitive and contextualized approaches.⁽¹⁹⁾

The construction of the playful uniform based on children's imagery represents a technological innovation that values the child's protagonism in the care process, aligning with the Child-Centered Care model (CCC). This model recognizes the child as an active subject and holder of rights, differing from patient-centered care, which sometimes neglects the specificities of the child population.⁽²⁰⁾ The choice of drawings based on the Child Drawing Hospital Manual (CD:H) not only ensures scientific rigor but also allows for the identification of visual and chromatic elements that positively influence the child's emotional state.

The selection of the uniform sketch with a predominance of the color blue for construction is based on evidence that points to the association of this color with lower levels of anxiety and a greater sense of calm, which is corroborated by studies that investigate the influence of colors on children's behavior in hospital environments.^(4,8) Furthermore, the choice of blue respects the children's preference identified in the drawings, which reinforces the importance of considering genuine children's aesthetics and not just adult representations of children's themes.

The results showed that traditional uniforms, especially white ones, can contribute to the "white coat syndrome," a phenomenon that increases fear and anxiety in hospitalized children, compromising adherence to treatment and the construction of a trusting relationship between professional and patient.⁽¹⁷⁾ Therefore, the development of uniforms that integrate playful elements and welcoming colors can be considered an effective strategy for the humanization of pediatric care. Beyond the psychological impact, the careful selection of fabrics and colors, as discussed in the literature review, also relates to practical aspects such as protection against ultraviolet radiation and thermal comfort, elements that strengthen the protective function of the uniform as work equipment.⁽⁹⁾

In the Brazilian context, there is a significant gap in research addressing the relationship between uniforms and children's perceptions, indicating the need to encourage studies that incorporate the child's voice as an active participant in the process of constructing care practices. This study, therefore, paves the way for future investigations that can validate and expand the developed prototypes, promoting the inclusion of the child's perspective as a pillar of innovation in pediatric nursing.

It is fundamental to recognize that the humanization of pediatric care involves multiple dimensions, and the clothing worn by professionals is a relevant component that, when aligned with children's needs and perceptions, enhances the therapeutic effects of the hospital environment, contributing to more positive and less traumatic care experiences.

This study's main limitation is the absence of a prototype validation stage with the target audience - children and nursing professionals -, which restricts the generalization of the results regarding the practical effectiveness of the playful uniform in reducing children's anxiety in hospital settings.

Despite this limitation, the study makes relevant contributions to innovation in pediatric care by proposing a care product based on children's imagery, respecting the child's perspective as an active subject in the care process. The methodology employed, based on the CD:H instrument, provides scientific rigor to the selection of graphic and chromatic elements, valuing child-centered care and promoting humanization strategies. Furthermore, the study opens avenues for the development of light technologies in nursing, with the potential for a positive impact on the hospitalized child's experience and the child-professional relationship.

CONCLUSION

This methodological study highlighted the relevance of creating nursing uniforms with a playful approach, designed from the child's perspective, valuing their imagery, colors, and characteristic features. The integration of children's drawings into the uniform design represents a technological innovation that contributes to reducing levels of anxiety in children, promoting a more welcoming and humanized environment in pediatric care.

The findings emphasized the need to rethink traditional patterns of professional attire, especially in the pediatric units, where the emotional impact of uniforms is particularly significant. The predominance of the color blue in the validated prototype highlights the relevance of visual elements that convey serenity and emotional comfort for hospitalized children.

In addition to expanding knowledge about the influence of clothing on child care, this study highlights the importance of including the child's voice and perception in the development of assistive technologies, in line with the principles of child-centered care and humanization in nursing.

Finally, it is recommended that future research further validate the proposed prototypes, as well as explore other dimensions of the uniform's impact on the professional-patient relationship, aiming to consolidate practices that contribute to improving the child's experience in the hospital environment.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributed to the conception or design of the study/research: Oliveira JD, Silva CSC. Contributed to data collection: Silva CSC, Sousa LM, Alves MEPG. Contributed to the analysis and/or interpretation of data: Silva CSC, Matias MCS, Macêdo MPS. Contributed to article writing or critical review: Matias MCS, Macêdo MPS, Oliveira JD. Final approval of the version to be published: Macêdo MPS, Oliveira JD.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We express our gratitude to the Ceará Foundation for the Support of Scientific and Technological Development (FUNCAP) for its support of this project, which enabled the development of a prototype with a highly sensitive and essential purpose.

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Conflicts of interest: No

Submission: 2025/05/20

Revised: 2025/07/14

Accepted: 2025/11/01

Publication: 2025/12/31

Editor in Chief or Scientific: José Wicto Pereira Borges
Associate Editor: Ingrid Martins Leite Lúcio

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