

ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE: WHAT, WHY, HOW & CHALLENGES

PRÁTICA AVANÇADA DE ENFERMAGEM: O QUE É, O PORQUÊ, COMO & DESAFIOS

PRACTICA AVANZADA DE ENFERMERÍA: LO QUE ES, PORQUE, COMO Y RETOS

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The current context of the COVID-19 pandemic is acknowledged as being an unprecedented time in healthcare. COVID-19 has highlighted more than ever the importance of the health care system for any society. The pandemic made even more evident the diverse chronic failures in the socio-economic structures of our societies and consequently, of the health care systems. The failures in care offered to older persons by the systems of care, the inequities in accessing care due to the absence of or limits of current public health systems and ultimately the weaknesses of health policies everywhere have become evident. Thus, more than ever, the importance of investment, organization of services, the provision effective and efficient health care and the importance of good and effective health policies have become clear. Moreover, the importance of good practices by health professionals for the recovery and maintenance of the population's health has become unquestionable.

The pandemic made more acute an existing need for improvement that was already evident in the global pre-pandemic health context. The exponential growth of chronic diseases, accompanied by therapeutic progress that has made it possible to prolong survival, points to the need to adopt new approaches that support the person in preserving his/her autonomy, through a reflective process of decision-making about the best way to live with his/her chronic condition. It will allow he/she to feel confident and able to achieve or maintain a desirable quality of life. In low and middle-income countries, the challenge of the chronic diseases is juxtaposed to infectious diseases and malnutrition, resulting from social inequity and consequently health inequalities⁽¹⁾. In this context, where the complexity of managing a chronic disease co-exist with infectious diseases and malnutrition, patients are more susceptible to episodes of decompensation and complications of their clinical portrait. Any follow-up on an outpatient basis becomes more complex, as well as any hospitalization since they become more severely ill and

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need more complex care. The interdisciplinary approach is crucial and nurses play a special role in this team, with their abilities in playing multiple roles, functions and providing different types of care. Nurses are now recognized as essential in all health care settings, whether in the communities, schools, nursing homes, long-term care agencies, primary care, hospitals and government healthcare agencies.

The essential role of the nurse in healthcare teams and the importance of reinforcing and supporting this role is highlighted by the World Health Organization in the campaign Nursing Now,

a three-year global campaign (2018-2020), aims to improve health by raising the profile and status of nursing worldwide. Run in collaboration with the World Health Organization and the International Council of Nurses, Nursing Now seeks to empower nurses to take their place at the heart of tackling 21st century health challenges and maximize their contribution to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC)^(2,13).

The campaign, which was settled 2020 as the “International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife” in honor of the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s birth, is based on the findings of the Triple Impact report conducted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health (APPG)⁽⁴⁾, published in 2016 in the United Kingdom. The report proposes that UHC will only be possible by strengthening nursing globally and this is not only about increasing the number of nurses, “[...] but also about making sure their contribution is properly understood and enabling them to work to their full potential.”^(4:2)

This report recognizes that globally, there is huge diversity in nurses’ education, experience and responsibilities. This diversity is closely related to a number of socio-economic and cultural factors. Thus, it is very difficult to generalize about nurses and nursing. However, specific and important challenges are observed worldwide: shortages of staff and deficient or missing equipment; the ‘invisibility’ of nurses and the undervaluing of the nursing contribution with nurses not being allowed to work to their full potential; the poor quality and/or lack of education and training; difficulties with recruitment, retention and return to nursing and lack of involvement of nurses in policy and planning decisions showing a weak and, in some cases, reduced leadership⁽⁴⁾.

Similarly, the essential common elements of its role contribute to the uniqueness of their response to the health needs of the population. More specifically, nurses are the first and even in some cases the only healthcare professionals with whom patients come into contact; nurses spend considerable amount of time with their patients and, mostly, provide very personal and intimate care as well as continuity of care throughout a period of illness or treatment; nurses work within a shared system of humanitarian and person-focused values; and are generally part of the local community and have a good understanding of local issues and culture⁽⁴⁾.

For those reasons, strengthening the unique features of the profession is a key point to be able to face the challenges confronting the profession and thus to be able to contribute to making health care more accessible and of better quality for the population. There are several ways forward to reinforce the profession. Among those strategies is the consolidation of advanced nursing practice, to which this editorial aims to draw attention.

There are several and sometimes confusing definitions in the literature of advanced nursing practice. Some authors define it as a result of specialization, or a position attained by virtue of being bestowed with the relevant title, as specialist nurses or advanced nurse practitioners⁽⁵⁾. Alternatively, others view the concept as an umbrella term including elements of advanced practice within the discipline of nursing, including the “[...] ability to discover, innovate and expand the nursing profession by utilizing multiple types of knowledge and skills along with research evidence and academic thinking processes”^(5:30).

Still according to the Canadian Nurses Association, advanced nursing practice involves analyzing and synthesizing knowledge; understanding, interpreting and applying nursing theory and research; and

³ UHC is part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agreement signed in September 2015 by the world’s nations according to whom all individuals in the world should be guaranteed access to health care. No one must be left behind⁽³⁾ (at least 400 million people are currently estimated not to have access to essential health services)

developing and advancing nursing knowledge and the profession as a whole⁽⁶⁾. Thus, the integration of nursing theories into training and thus into clinical practice is essential to ensure a practice permeated with a disciplinary perspective and philosophies⁽⁷⁾. On the other hand, deep clinical knowledge is also a prerequisite and the importance of clinical reasoning has been increasingly highlighted. It allows the mobilization of the knowledge acquired in the evaluation of the patient, in the use of a logic structure in choosing of the most pertinent and effective intervention and in determining the ways of evaluating the outcomes⁽⁶⁾.

As such, it may foresee that the training of advanced practice nurses is complex and varies in different cultural contexts, according to local needs, current legislation, etc. The recognition of the origins of advanced practice in each context and how it can be inserted and strengthened should be the object of studies aimed at understanding the factors that facilitate this insertion and those that serve as obstacles and must be overcome in order to continue to promote this advanced practice.

In this International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, nothing is more appropriate than to propose a discussion about all the aspects that influence and determine the viability of an advanced nursing practice. Through this reflection, we can contribute to thinking about ways to strengthen nursing, making it more effective and efficient to enhance its triple impact on society: better health, greater gender equality, and economic growth⁽⁴⁾.

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2 – writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Maria Cecilia Gallani and Clémence Dallaire;

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