

## **Historical context of nursing professionalization in Brazil: a journey into the past**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to describe the historical context of nursing professionalization in Brazil. In the middle of all this process, nursing has been developing in Brazil since the beginning, facing several challenges, in an attempt to consolidate itself as a profession. It is an exploratory and descriptive study, that uses as instruments of theoretical foundation the bibliographical and documental research. The study makes a rescue on how nursing has been consolidating with the passing of centuries, registering the appearance of nursing in the country, pointing still as the professionalization of nursing happened in Brazil, as well as the main legislation referring to this context. When reflecting on the history of nursing and its development, it becomes possible to recognize the profession and the challenges faced, allowing problematize the past of nursing.

**Keywords:** Nursing; History of Nursing; Education, Nursing.

## **1. Introduction**

Oguisso (2001) states that studying history is of fundamental importance to discover paths taken by past generations and to understand the reasons that motivated the choice of certain paths, which may have repercussions on present circumstances.

During all this process, nursing has been developing in Brazil since the beginning, facing several challenges, to consolidate itself as a profession. A professional category indifferent to the compression of its past and history, has difficulty in building its future, because the valorization of this historical context allows a better foundation of nursing.

The objective of this research is to describe the historical context of nursing professionalization in Brazil, helping to understand its emergence in the practice of caring, as well as providing an overview of the general overview of modern nursing and its main representatives. It is an exploratory and descriptive study, which uses as theoretical basis the bibliographic and documental research, collecting materials and documents (books, papers, theses, dissertations, legislation and other official documents) previously elaborated to discuss the history of nursing, based on renowned scholars of the area such as Oguisso (2007), Oguisso, Campos and Moreira (2011), Geovanini (2010) Stutz (2010), among others

The study is a valuable element for the understanding of this process, because it makes a rescue, about how nursing has been consolidating over the centuries, registering the emergence of nursing in the country, pointing out how the professionalization of nursing happened in Brazil, as well as the main legislation related to this context.

## **2. The emergence of Nursing in Brazil**

During the colonial period, health actions were initially linked to the mysticism and customs of the shamans and sorcerers in the tribe itself, as well as to domestic practices carried out by indigenous women for the care of the elderly, children, and sick people (GEOVANINI et al., 2010).

The situation in medicine was dramatic, and even more so in the care and assistance services for the

sick. The majority of sick individuals were under the responsibility of their own families, in the figure of the "mother"; or of initiatives of the charitable institutions of the time, such as the Santa Casas de Misericórdia and religious orders, following the Portuguese model (KLE/TEMBERG; SIQUEIRA, 2003).

In 1549 the first Jesuits arrived in Brazil. They docked in Bahia and then went to the south, north and interior of the country. One of the pioneers and most dedicated to catechesis was José de Anchieta (1534-1597) who arrived in Brazil in 1553. In his writings, there is information that makes it possible to survey the nosological picture of Brazil at the time (GEOVANINI et al., 2010).

Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Santos was the first Brazilian hospital created in 1543 by Brás Cubas. In this hospital, sick people were cared for by religious of the Society of Jesus or the Jesuit Order, created in 1534. In the XVI and XIX centuries other Santa Casa de Misericórdia were created such as: São Paulo (1560) this one reformed and finished in 1884, Minas Gerais (1735), Santa Catarina (1789) and Angra dos Reis (1824), Juiz de Fora (1854), respectively. There are no relevant records about how nursing was practiced in the first Santa Casa de Misericórdia, however, it is supposed that the Jesuits were responsible for the general nursing works, making themselves assistants for the indigenous and enslaved Africans, to whom they taught how to take care of the sick and other crafts around their own care like cleaning, order, among others. This scenario is portrayed until the 18th century (OGUISSO; CAMPOS; MOREIRA, 2011; FRANCO, 2014; COMERALATO, 2003).

During the 19th century, changes in the economic and political scenario in Brazil had direct implications on the health sector. The frequent occurrence of epidemic diseases in the country hindered the negotiation of Brazilian products, which were destined for export. This situation led to a policy of control of these epidemic diseases, the need for trained and prepared professionals to provide care, sanitary surveillance of ports, and attention with teeth. And it is in these circumstances that the institutionalization of nursing education in Brazil occurs (KLE/TEMBERG; SIQUEIRA, 2003).

The most prominent name among the precursors of Brazilian nursing is Anna Justina Ferreira Nery, daughter of Luisa Maria das Virgens and José Ferreira de Jesus. Anna Nery was born on December 13, 1814, in Cachoeira, and died in 1880. When Brazil entered the Triple Alliance, together with Uruguay and Argentina in 1865, Anna Nery's children left to serve in the war against Paraguay. On that occasion she wrote a letter to the President of the Province of Bahia, Manuel Pinto de Souza Dantas, offering to serve the war wounded. On August 13, 1865, Anna Nery embarked for the battle fields, and even with the death of her eldest son and a nephew, Anna Nery continued to act in the war with the wounded, making her home in Asunción a shelter for them. She returned to Brazil in 1870 and was received with many tributes and recognition (OGUISSO; CAMPOS; MOREIRA, 2011; CARDOSO; MIRANDA, 1999).

Cardoso and Miranda (1999, p.341) highlight one observation: in relation to Anna Nery's request to participate in the war, her appeal is fundamentally affective and personal. "It is hard to believe that a widowed woman, after twenty-one years of solitary dedication to the care of her children, faced with the threat of losing them during the war, made a request to accompany them for patriotic reasons. However, it is still relevant Anna Nery's performance in front of the nursing profession

### **3. The professionalization of Nursing in Brazil**

In November, 1852, the Hospice Pedro II was inaugurated in Rio de Janeiro, linked to the Santa Casa de Misericórdia. The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul also worked in this institution. However, the end of the 19th century brought several socio-political changes, and with the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, there was the segregation of the State and the Church. Decree No. 142 of January 11, 1890 dismembered the Hospice of the Santa Casa de Misericórdia, changing its name to Hospício Nacional de Alienados (MOREIRA; OGUISSO, 2005).

In the first republic (1889-1930), Brazil was governed by the oligarchies of the richest states, especially São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. (BERTOLLI FILHO, 1996). In 1890 the departure of the Sisters of Charity from the Hospício Nacional de Alienados caused a crisis: there were no people to take care of people with mental disorders. Then the doctors and/or psychiatrists took the initiative to find a school that could prepare individuals to care for the sick (MOREIRA, 2007).

Despite the precarious conditions for the operation of that hospital and for the assistance that was carried out by unqualified personnel, the idea of creating a school to prepare the nursing staff not only for the Hospício Nacional de Alienados, but also for the military and civilian hospitals of the newly installed Republic emerged. According to the above mentioned, this idea was realized by Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca, head of the provisional government of the Republic, who through the Decree n. 791/1890, of September 27, founded in the Hospício Nacional de Alienados the "Professional School of Nurses and Nurse", being officially instituted the nursing teaching in Brazil (MOREIRA, 2007; MONTEIRO; OGUISSO, 2015), as well as the preparation for the professional to exercise a public position and the obtaining of more specialized knowledge, something that guarantees the accessibility of a new job market and also retirement after a certain period of service.

The Escola Profissional de Enfermeiros e Enfermeiras is currently called EEAP – Escola de Enfermagem Alfredo Pinto, belonging to the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - UNIRIO. The training methods of this school were the same as those established at the Salpêtrière Schools in France; the course lasted 2 years, and its curriculum dealt with basic aspects of hospital care, predominantly curative (GEOVANINI et al., 2010). Stutz (2010) highlights that the profile of the student admitted to nursing school was focused on the less favored social classes. The social elite of the period were not interested in any of these services of lodging, food and much less monthly gratuities, because all of this already possessed - and much more - and it was also not interesting to provide services that they considered inferior.

In 1894 the Hospital Samaritano was founded in São Paulo, because of the efforts of men and women from the evangelical community, foreigners, and Brazilians, mostly living in São Paulo. The nursing activities were carried out by foreign nurses, mainly English. From the year 1896 on, the institution began to receive students in boarding school. This course is considered the first in Brazil to adopt the nightingalean teaching system (OGUISSO, 2007). That same year private institutions joined this official government effort, creating schools and open courses, such as those held by Hospital Samaritano, in the city of São Paulo; this task was joined by the Brazilian Red Cross - Branch State of São Paulo, in 1912.

This same school, in 1914, offered a course for volunteer nurses, and in 1916, a course for professional nurses, both in the city of Rio de Janeiro (OGUISSO; CAMPOS; MOREIRA, 2011).

The Regulations of the General Hospital of the National Public Health Department (NPHD) were approved by decree n°. 15,799, november 10, 1922, and provided for the foundation of the nurses' school of this Department. Geovanini, et al. (2010) report that the Rockefeller Foundation Commission (1915) belonging to the International Health Board (IHB) received a request for financial support from Carlos Ribeiro Justiniano Chagas, then director of DNSP, to contribute to the project of organizing the Public Health Nursing service in Brazil, under the supervision of American nurses. In December 1923, one year later, decree n° 16,300 of 31/12/1923 in fact regulated the school for nurses in this department, now called Anna Nery Nursing School, of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) (FREITAS, 2007).

The Anna Nery School of Nursing has resized the model of professional nursing in the country, following the standards set by the nightingalean model. By choosing for its higher social classes, with the help of a policy interested in supporting the development of the profession, it became the standard for the other schools, directly serving the project then established (GEOVANINI, et al., 2010).

In this school Anna Nery, most of the candidates were upper middle class girls, because two of the requirements were: to know how to read and write, and to present a certificate of good morals; characteristics related to the desired profile, being several of them recruited by sanitary doctors from NPHD. By determining the ideal woman "with basic knowledge and in accordance with social norms, doctors kept the "illiterate employee" away from the work of health institutions, while they favored women of "good custom," granted by private coexistence and adequately socially approved for circulation in public environments (SANTO, 2012 p.313)

Decree n° 20,109 was enacted in 1931, establishing the Anna Nery Nursing School as the standard official school for teaching in Brazil. In other words, from that moment on, nursing schools, official or private, that wished to be equalized, had to meet basic requirements, in the model of the standard school, which included everything that concerned the direction, the conditions for entry, the duration of the course, the composition of the program and the conditions of the hospital itself for the practical teaching of nursing. The purpose of this determination was to ensure a high level of professional training of nurses in Brazil (MONTEIRO; OGUISSO, 2015).

It is necessary to highlight in 1926 the foundation of the National Association of Brazilian Nurses, today, the Brazilian Association of Nursing (BAN), was held by the first nurses trained at Anna Nery School. In 1928, this organization was legally registered and affiliated to the International Nursing Council in July of the following year. This entity aims to bring together nursing professionals, among them, nurses, obstetricians, technicians, nursing auxiliaries and nursing academics; promoting the technical-scientific, cultural and political development; enabling research and exchange with other national and international organizations, in addition to disseminating the nursing activities (FREITAS, 2007).

Law n° 775, of August 6, 1949, was the first legislation to be passed on nursing education in Brazil. According to the law, the Nursing course should last 36 months, and the nursing assistant course should be held in 18 months, in addition to requiring that Nursing education be centralized in university centers. According to art. 5° of this law, to be able to enter the nursing course, the applicants, from then on, should

present the certificate of conclusion of the secondary course; and for the nursing assistant course, the certificate of conclusion of the primary course (MONTEIRO; OGUISSO, 2015).

Then, the law n° 2.604, of September 17th, 1955, dealt with the exercise of nursing, determining the categories that could act in this profession: nurse, obstetrician, nursing assistant practical nurses or midwives. At that time, there were several categories within nursing, such as practical nurses, practical nurses, nursing assistants, military nurses, attendants and so many other names (FREITAS, 2007). With law n° 2995/56, all nursing schools began to require full secondary education or equivalent from their candidates, however, only in the following year did Nursing begin its steps toward higher education (GEOVANINI et al; 2010).

Matsui, Cruz e Oguisso (2015, p. 49) report in their researches on the legislation that "Law n° 4.024/61, first Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDB), the Ministry of Education organized the teaching of Nursing, having in mind that until that moment the courses and schools were created in isolation". According to the authors, the aforementioned law established that high school would be offered in two cycles (elementary education and high school), including, among other courses, those of technical formation. The principle of high school technical education was to attend the following areas: industrial, agricultural and commercial, in which nursing was not covered. Based on this law, it was established that those high school technical courses that were not specified there would be regulated by the different education systems, i.e., the state education departments.

Oguisso (1977) states that, since the 1970s, the legislation on the nursing assistant course, regulated by Law n° 775 of August 6, 1949, had been going through successive changes, confusing the directors of the schools or courses, or forcing them to continuous adaptation. In the Anna Nery and Luiza de Marillac Nursing Schools, the technical nursing course was instituted in 1966, through the crafts of the Federal Council of Education 171/66 and 224/66, respectively. The courses in both schools were operated on the basis of their own legislation, disconnected from the national education system.

The Federal Council of Education instituted the intensive nursing assistant course in 1970, through the craft 75/70, in eleven months of duration, determining as a requirement for the admission of candidates the minimum age close to 18 years and the completion of the gymnasial course. However, even before this new system could be implemented and effective by some schools and could be evaluated, a new teaching law was passed on August 11, 1971, 5,692, which once again modified the nursing assistant course system, establishing the guidelines and bases for teaching 1st and 2nd grades. With so many uncertainties, at that time the author already asked: "Is there a distinction between the nursing assistant and the nursing technician? (OGUISSO, 1977, p. 173).

On July 12, 1973, through law n. 5.905, the Regional Nursing Councils (CORENs) were created, entities of inspection of the professional exercise of nursing, at federal and state levels. According to the precepts of this law, the Federal Council of Nursing (COFEN) organized three different boards for registration: board I (nurses), board II (technicians), board III (nursing assistants, practical nursing and midwives) (FREITAS, 2007).

At the end of the 1970s, Brazil suffered the effects of an international crisis in the capitalist world, characterized by restrictions on social policies in the face of reduced financing caused by the recessive economic crisis. The crisis was not limited to the imbalance between expenses and revenues, but arose

from a series of political actions, strongly evidenced by growing unemployment, decrease in the real value of salaries, fraud against the social security system, low public sector assistance coverage; growing health care spending through the inclusion of new technologies; and by a predominantly individual and curative health model (PEREIRA et al., 2009).

Barros and Herold Júnior (2013) point out that, as far as education is concerned, the 1980s were strongly marked by debates regarding the recreation of the Brazilian public and democratic educational system, where the negotiation process demanded the increase of the possibilities of access to basic education, and it was the responsibility of the public power to offer it in a free and equal way to all Brazilians. Still, the plan of assistance of the nursing work, "is given in a way to subsidize the medical attention. This is related to the technical and social division of work, being the responsibility of this agent to do it intellectually and the other workers to do it technically and directly" (PEREIRA et al., 2009, p. 773).

Freitas (2007) states that only in Law nº 7.498, of June 25, 1986 (with regulating Decree nº 94.406, of June 8, 1987), is that each nursing category is discriminated according to its specific attributions, including that of the nursing technician. In this way, art. 7 highlights who are the nursing technicians and art. 12 determines which are the activities of their competence. The nursing actions were classified in complex and elementary activities for the first time.

The Law that deals with the professional exercise of nursing in Brazil is nº 7.498, of June 25th, 1986, regulated by decree 94.406 of June 8th of the following year (BRASIL, 1986). Some articles of the aforementioned law were vetoed and, in addition, there were other devices that had not been included, such as some bold devices that the nursing leaders of the time tried to assure the nurses (OGUISSO, 2001).

According to Barros and Herold Júnior (2013), the ideas discussed in the 1980's, as previously explained, were accepted by the 1988 Constitution and then defended by LDB no. 9,394/96. With this new LDB, basic education became three levels: early childhood education, elementary school and high school. In relation to the development of professional education at the secondary level.

Within this legal framework, the schools that offered nursing courses sought to adjust the curriculum of the technical nursing and nursing assistant courses. Those institutions that kept only isolated courses of nursing assistant, needed to install the professional qualification of technician in nursing. The professional qualification courses could only be offered by educational institutions that had the respective authorized technical professional qualification. Thus, the courses were organized in two stages: the first (or 1st module) corresponds to the professional qualification, offering the nursing assistant certificate, and at the end of the 2nd stage (or 2nd module), corresponding to the professional qualification providing the nursing technician diploma (MATSUI; CRUZ; OGUISSO, 2015).

The COFEN Resolution 276/2003 established the maximum period of five years for the authorization of provisional registration in COREN, for nursing assistant. According to this resolution, the Nursing assistant does not receive from that agency the definitive registration to act in this professional category. The concession is offered and effected by the council, in case the individual proves that he is giving continuity to the studies for Habilitation in Technician in Nursing, or still, taking the graduation in nursing (CAVERNI, OGUISSO, 2005).

Stutz (2010) also mentions that historical records show a common problem for nursing schools in Brazil, which still persists in the daily life of many of them: the teaching of nursing requires learning beyond the classroom content, experiences provided in the daily routine of health institutions, especially hospital institutions. In this way, there is the need to conquer a space for insertion and reception of nursing students in the routine of hospital institutions, which becomes, many times, a challenge for educational institutions in the area (STUTZ, 2010).

As a profession, it is fundamental that nursing has strong entities, so that it can be represented in society with legal and ethical apparatuses for professional exercise; as a field of work in the health area, it needs to defend a model of work organization that also takes into consideration the population's right to health that allows the expression of subjectivity and creative pleasure at work, considering the multiple subjects, with individual and cultural differences, who are involved in collective work in health (PIRES, 2009).

#### 4. Conclusion

The history of nursing has as purpose to explain the lived situation and to make possible a way of perception about all this process. When reflecting on the history of nursing and its development, it becomes possible to recognize the profession and the challenges faced, allowing to problematize the past of nursing. This study has an immeasurable value for the historical rescue of the professionalization of nursing in Brazil, which involves not only the history told through laws, resolutions or other physical documents, but also the experiences of those who made this history happen, corroborated with authors of literature.

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