



REFLEXIONES - ENSAYOS

NURSING STUDIES IN PORTUGAL.

LOS ESTUDIOS DE ENFERMERÍA EN PORTUGAL..

***Dos Santos Curado, A. **Camacho Cardoso, M^a. B. ***Mendes Gaspar, M^a F.**

*Prof. Coordinadora. Mestre en Desenvolvimento Infantil. Escola Superior de Enfermagem Calouste Gulbenkian. **Prof. Coordinadora. Mestre em Business Administration. E. S. E. Maria Fernanda Resende. ***Prof. Adjunta. Mestre em Comportamento Organizacional. E.S. E. Maria Fernanda Resende. Lisboa. Portugal

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HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

In the last 20 years, Nursing Education in Portugal went through a lot of changes. The most relevant has been the suppression of two levels of education in 1974. By the end of the eighties, students applying to nursing schools should have exactly the same conditions as students who applied to any other degree given a Faculty, which means that they should have completed 12 years of studies, the same requirements to apply to any university course.

Higher education in Portugal comprises of two branches: University and Polytechnic studies. Since 1988, Nursing Education has been integrated in the Portuguese Educational System within the Polytechnic Higher Education. Universities offer courses that give degrees. Polytechnics offer the students the possibility of obtaining a diploma after a three year course, a degree after two more years and post-graduate programmes. Therefore, Nursing Education within Polytechnic Institutes has closely followed the degrees offered by Faculties within the University system.

Changes in the Educational System led to changes in Higher Nursing Education, namely in what concerns the integration of Nursing Schools in the Educational System. During those years, Nursing Education was a responsibility of the Ministry of Education for academic, research and teaching matters, and of the Ministry of Health for finance and administrative purposes. Since 1999, Nursing Education is an exclusive responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

Polytechnic institutions may either be independent higher education schools or may be grouped into polytechnic institutes. Nowadays, Nursing Schools may be independent, or

belong to Institutes of Nursing and Health Education or, in very few specific cases, mainly because of regional reasons, organised as special Departments in Universities.

The four Public Nursing Schools in the region of Lisbon are currently negotiating a protocol of collaboration in order to integrate the Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon, as a unique School of Nursing. The same kind of movement is being undertaken by other Nursing Schools in other regions of the country.

In Portugal, we have twenty-five Public and ten Private Nursing Schools. These thirty five Schools organise courses at the higher educational level. All schools have pedagogical and administrative autonomy. Some private Universities are also offering nursing courses.

TEACHING NURSING: PAST AND PRESENT

Until the end of the nineties, Nursing Schools developed two different courses: a course of 3 years, which granted a basic degree and an advanced nursing course, with two more years, which granted a master degree.

The advanced nursing courses were post-registration courses and the nurses were obliged to have two years of experience before undertaking these courses. They prepared specialist nurses to perform more complex nursing care tasks in different clinical areas of practice.

The Advanced Nursing Courses curricula should include the following areas:

- specific clinical specialisation,
- nursing management,
- educational sciences and
- research

In 1994, the following courses were approved: Community Nursing, Child Health and Paediatric Nursing, Maternal Health and Obstetric Nursing, Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing, Medical-Surgical Nursing and Rehabilitation Nursing. A Nursing Management Advanced Course was also approved. According to national or regional needs, other courses may be developed. The advanced nursing courses approved in 1994, replaced other post basic nursing courses which were already being taught in our country. Both the Basic degree Courses and the Advanced Nursing Courses finished in 1998.

In 1999 started a first level of nursing course with four years of length that grants a licence degree. Curricula differ among schools, because they have scientific and pedagogical autonomy, although major subjects and disciplines are always in conformity with the European Union directives and standards. Nursing course provide adequate human, ethic, scientific and technical education in nursing in order to care for individuals, families, groups and communities at the three levels of prevention. The students are prepared in order to acquire knowledge, understanding, skills, behaviours and attitudes needed to plan, perform and evaluate nursing care. It provides also the ability to participate in nursing management, to collaborate in nursing education, as well as giving the basic tools to carry out research studies in nursing.

Nurses who obtain a licence degree may attend a master degree course, either in nursing or in other areas, and also higher post-graduate courses which do not grant academic degrees. Some universities already have masters degree courses in nursing science, with a

length of two years. Nurses may also be candidates to a doctor degree, after the masters studies.

Nursing teachers' careers, because they are included in Polytechnic Institutes, are similar to the ones of teachers working in the Universities: they must have a Doctoral or a Master degree. We have two categories: Coordinator Professor (those who hold a Phd) and Adjunct Professor (those who hold on MA).

TEACHING NURSING: THE FUTURE

The future of education in the European Union (EU), in which nursing education is included, is closely related to the results of the Bologna Conference, namely the degree system (graduation and post-graduation) and other courses without a academic degree with a special reference to ECTS.

Students' and teachers' mobility throughout the EU territory is nowadays a reality, although it's necessary for both to obtain an equivalence, which can be changed according to the Bologna Conference. To achieve greater compatibility and comparability among systems of Higher Education, the Declaration of the Bologna Conference focuses in particular in the increase of international competitiveness between the European systems and others. The main goal is to create an European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European Higher Education.

*The Declaration reflects a search for a common European answer to common European problems. The process originates from the recognition that in spite of their valuable differences, European higher education systems are facing common internal and external challenges related to the growth and diversification of higher education, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, the expansion of private and transnational education, etc. The Declaration recognises the value of coordinated reforms, compatible systems and common action.**

A set of specified objectives were defined:

- a common framework of readable and comparable degrees;
- an undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries;
- the ECTS-compatible credit systems;
- an European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods;
- the elimination of remaining obstacles to the free mobility.

In Portugal, in accordance to the Bologna process, the Law nº109-A/2001 was approved. The contents of this law are related with education policies, the bases to higher education development and ECTS credit system.

Concerning Nursing Higher Education in our country, we consider that the four years for the first degree must be assured, due to the complexity of health and nursing care.

To conclude our reflexion about nursing education, we would like to reinforce the fight of the majority of the countries to include nursing courses in the higher level of education, in similarity to the other courses, concerning the requirements to apply to any university course. This education model will grant nurses access the masters and Phd degrees in all European countries.

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