

ENHANCING NURSING QUALITY IN HEALTHCARE

Kushtrim Salihu

Mental Health Center, AAB College, Pristina, Kosovo, kushtrim.salihu@aab-edu.net

Petya Trendafilova

Faculty of Healthcare, Medical University Sofia, Bulgaria, p.trendafilova@yahoo.com

Abstract: Nursing originated from the compassionate care provided to the vulnerable, impoverished, and forsaken, stemming from a tradition of tending to the ill and injured. Today, nursing practice remains rooted in principles of compassion, care, attentiveness, acceptance, and trust. As the oldest profession in healthcare, nursing boasts a rich educational tradition, evolving over time to encompass educational opportunities up to the doctoral level. The authentic identity and intrinsic value structure of nursing have become focal points of inquiry among professionals in recent decades. Identity is pivotal for the nursing profession, as it is defined by distinct determinants that differentiate nursing from other professions. While healthcare is defined in various ways, its common denominator is the centrality of the patient, making quality healthcare the paramount goal. Nurses play a crucial role in delivering continuous, modern, and comprehensive healthcare, necessitating the development of methodologies for analysis, research, monitoring, comparison, and enhancement of quality indicators. Quality indicators serve as valuable tools for identifying areas in healthcare requiring improvement, encompassing aspects such as pain management, infection control, patient handover, nursing documentation, and patient satisfaction.

Keywords: nursing, patient care, infection prevention, attentiveness, trust

1. PHASES OF NURSING ETHICS DEVELOPMENT

Caring for the sick and vulnerable has been an integral aspect of human existence since ancient times, representing one of the earliest forms of organized professional endeavors aimed at addressing human needs, health, and overall well-being. It was upon these principles that Florence Nightingale, a British nurse and humanist, established modern nursing during the 19th century, laying the foundation for what is now the most prevalent healthcare profession in health systems worldwide. Over the course of history, nursing as a profession has undergone several developmental phases, consistently striving to meet the demands of the profession, adapting to contemporary trends, societal needs, and advancements in allied sciences fundamental to healthcare—the primary scientific discipline underpinning nursing practice. Evolving from a supportive role initially focused solely on disease and patient care, modern nursing now encompasses the professional domain of registered nurses, healthcare professionals who independently, or as part of multidisciplinary healthcare teams, undertake a wide array of interventions aimed at promoting health, preventing illness, and providing care, treatment, and rehabilitation to the sick. Virginia Henderson (1897-1996), a nurse, researcher, and university professor, played a pivotal role in shaping the current state of professional development and integrity within the nursing field. By conceptualizing nursing as a "holistic healthcare profession with a focus on the individual's health across various life stages, from birth to death," and defining the process of healthcare delivery as a scientific method within nursing practice, she significantly contributed to advancing the profession's standards and principles (Knežević, D., Jović, D., & Egeljić, N. 2020).

Throughout history, nursing has been rooted in the care of the vulnerable, impoverished, and neglected, as well as in the tradition of tending to the sick and injured. Even in modern times, nursing practice continues to uphold essential moral virtues: compassion, attentiveness, care, acceptance, and mutual trust. As the oldest healthcare profession, nursing boasts a rich educational tradition. Over the centuries, nursing has traversed a challenging path, evolving to the point where nurses now have the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies in the field. Initially emerging as a calling driven by a sense of duty to fulfill the needs of others, nursing predominantly fell under the domain of women, aligning with societal expectations of women as nurturers and caretakers.

Present-day nurses, as members of a relatively young profession, strive to garner recognition within society, albeit at a gradual pace. Professional ethics play a crucial role in bolstering the nursing profession, facilitating ongoing discussions about its essence, societal significance, patient interactions, and professional status. Through the integration of professional nursing ethics into their practice, nurses endeavor to enhance the expected virtues theoretically and practically, thereby upholding nursing as a humane profession characterized by compassion, practice, and professionalism (Henderson, V.1978).

Given that nursing revolves around caring for individuals who are often vulnerable and facing health challenges, there is a heightened emphasis on the moral virtues inherent to the profession. As nurses' education levels rise, new and more sophisticated methods and procedures are introduced into healthcare, grounded in scientific research. Consequently, nursing is now perceived through both scientific and moral lenses. Internationally, nursing is

recognized as an independent profession, characterized by high levels of education and skilled practitioners. Undergraduate and graduate nursing programs have become integral components of university curricula.

However, a fundamental question remains unanswered: does the nursing profession possess a distinct and proven identity? This identity is crucially shaped by clear and specific factors that set nursing apart from other professions. Authentic assessment of healthcare and nursing within society provides the foundation for nurses to gain a deeper appreciation of the value of their profession. (Marinić, R. 2016).

The advancement of medical science has enabled nursing to establish greater scientific independence. However, it's imperative to acknowledge that while autonomous, the medical and nursing professions remain inherently complementary, with the patient at the focal point of their attention. Nursing draws upon foundational knowledge from medical sciences and combines it with insights gained from practical nursing experience. To foster independent growth and improvement, nursing must engage in research specific to its practice and apply the findings effectively.

The trajectory of nursing development is intricately linked to the environments and circumstances in which nursing practice unfolds, resulting in significant variances within specific nursing branches and across different countries. Theories of healthcare, which have evolved over the past few decades of the twentieth century, serve as the scientific underpinning for the advancement of nursing practice.

Nurses play a crucial role in facilitating individuals' active participation in all aspects of healthcare, promoting self-determination, and fostering reliance on personal strengths. It's essential to empower individuals to harness their capabilities fully and strive for maximum independence. As nursing transitions from focusing solely on illness to embracing a broader perspective centered on health, questions surrounding nursing professional ethics come to the forefront. This evolution from a vocation to a fully-fledged profession, a transition already realized in highly developed countries like the USA, underscores the significance of ethical considerations within nursing practice (Živanović, D., 2021).

2. NURSING AUTONOMY AND ITS CRUCIAL ROLE IN MODERN HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

In contemporary healthcare systems worldwide, nurses continue to face challenges regarding their autonomy within the profession. It is evident that significant changes in the delicate dynamics between healthcare professions can only be achieved through comprehensive health system reforms. A critical issue concerning nursing autonomy lies in the disparity in how the nursing profession is perceived compared to other health professions, particularly physicians, certain interest groups, or society at large.

Many physicians are hesitant to support the autonomy of nurses, fearing that it may weaken their own professional status. Additionally, nurses often lack strong advocacy from interest groups that could advocate for their independence from traditional frameworks. Furthermore, despite being undervalued, nurses frequently refrain from demanding higher salaries, which aligns with the bureaucratic structure of health institutions (Henderson, V., 1978). Inherent in human nature is a primal instinct to combat disease and mortality, driven by the innate desire for self-preservation. Historically, the initial caregivers for the vulnerable were predominantly women, often guided by maternal instincts, especially mothers. Over time, men also became increasingly involved in such caregiving roles. The genesis of organized nursing can be traced back to efforts to elevate it from its subservient status, largely due to the perception of those who practiced it as weak and society's limited recognition of the necessity for their education.

During the 18th century, advancements in science and medicine played a pivotal role in shaping patient care practices. During this period, physicians were primarily responsible for organizing and administering patient treatments, while nurses—often referred to as caregivers—undertook various interventions, ranging from simple to more complex tasks. However, as patient care grew increasingly intricate, a notable shortage of adequately trained personnel emerged, hindering the delivery of comprehensive care. The insufficiency of education among staff members posed a significant challenge in meeting the evolving demands of patient care.

This shortage, coupled with a growing interest in social welfare issues, particularly in hospital management and the provision of assistance to the sick, spurred efforts to professionalize nursing and enhance the quality of care. These endeavors were underpinned by a quest for theoretical frameworks aimed at optimizing the organization and delivery of healthcare services (Egenes, K. J., 2017).

Presently, nurses are making substantial efforts towards establishing themselves as an autonomous profession that undergoes continuous development across all levels of higher education. This entails acquiring a solid theoretical and practical foundation in all facets of the profession, drawing upon knowledge and insights not only from within their own field but also from other disciplines. Such interdisciplinary collaboration not only enriches nursing practice but also lays a strong foundation for altering public perceptions and attitudes towards the profession.

To foster a better understanding of the true competencies and value of modern nursing among the public, concerted efforts are required, including awareness campaigns and educational initiatives. It is imperative that the public perception of nurses aligns with the realities of their roles and capabilities. Addressing the issue of nurses' autonomy necessitates a collective acknowledgment of the challenges and complexities involved, recognizing it as an evolutionary process in defining the professional role of nurses (Prlić, N., 2020).

3. MEETING THE NEEDS OF NURSING IN HEALTHCARE: A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

The term "profession" derives from the act of publicly declaring or expressing oneself, often involving a commitment or obligation towards others. It implies making a solemn vow or statement, typically associated with a particular field of knowledge, belief system, or ideology. In essence, a professional is someone who possesses expertise in a specific domain, adheres to a set of values, and fully embraces the responsibilities of their profession. Historically, professions evolved from medieval trades, emphasizing practical skills and the accumulation of expertise through hands-on experience. Central to this development was the need for practitioners to adhere to established rules and standards within their respective fields. However, as the complexity of healthcare increased, particularly in hospital settings, a shortage of adequately trained personnel emerged. This underscored the importance of organizing healthcare delivery effectively, with a focus on optimizing patient care and assistance while ensuring adherence to professional standards and guidelines (Živanović, D. 2021).

Competent nurses possess the ability to identify and articulate patients' needs, drawing upon the knowledge acquired during their education. Given their continuous presence with patients, nurses often establish a rapport of trust, which allows them to gather valuable information, even in informal settings, crucial for problem definition. It's important to note that nurses are not always expected to provide solutions themselves; rather, they are expected to comprehend the issue at hand and seek guidance or intervention from individuals with relevant expertise (Čukljek, 2005).

Nurses serve as a conduit between various perspectives, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the patient's condition. This holistic approach facilitates optimal care and addresses the diverse aspects contributing to the patient's well-being. Nurses must remember that the essence of their profession lies in serving humanity, placing the individual at the forefront. By embracing an integrative healthcare model, nurses can acknowledge their significance within the healthcare system, while recognizing the collaborative nature of patient care involving diverse healthcare professionals.

The application of nursing theories, specialized terminology, practice concepts, and structural frameworks is essential for achieving healthcare goals. What distinguishes a profession from an occupation is the existence of developed theories, principles, and organizational frameworks. In the early stages of nursing's development, efforts were made to establish its own theoretical foundation and principles, rather than relying solely on theories from other disciplines. The emergence of nursing theories in the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a significant step, although initially, they mainly outlined the tasks of nursing. The momentum towards developing authentic nursing theories received a significant boost in 1962, when the American government initiated financial support for nursing education programs, including doctoral studies in nursing (Prlić, 2020).

Nursing practice must be creative and flexible, individualized and socially oriented, compassionate and skilled. Professional nurses must know how to apply their knowledge to help people. Nurses do not have the support of strong interest groups, their work is undervalued, they themselves do not advocate enough for higher salaries, which is a response to all entities in the health system. The need for nursing is universal. In the healthcare system today, nursing is an independent profession, and as a result, nurses must have a high level of acquired knowledge, expertise, a high level of morality, motivation and creativity. Today, in connection with this issue, the nursing profession is fragmented mainly due to the rejection of the ideals set in the model of moral authority, and in different approaches in the search for those attributes that were special, specific and unique to the identity of the profession (Čukljek, S. 2005).

4. TRANSFORMING NURSING'S POSITION IN HEALTHCARE: TOWARDS AUTONOMY AND RECOGNITION

The social and professional standing of nursing globally has undergone significant complexities over the past decades, diverging from its historical context. Until about two decades ago, nursing education at the university level was largely inaccessible, and nurses' roles in the healthcare system remained predominantly passive, with minimal representation in healthcare institutions. Despite the increasing number of nurses obtaining higher education since the inception of modern healthcare systems, their potential for actively contributing to healthcare system efficiency and enhancing the quality of healthcare services remains largely unrecognized. Moreover, jobs for nurses with advanced education are often absent from current healthcare job classifications.

Recognizing the evolving roles brought about by healthcare system reforms worldwide, modern health systems

acknowledge nursing as an autonomous profession capable of substantially improving healthcare system efficiency and enhancing the quality of basic professional activities. The US Institute of Medicine advocates for additional education for non-university-educated nurses, given the increasing complexity of managerial roles within integrated healthcare systems, with the expectation that nurses globally will eventually hold university degrees.

However, a critical examination of current nursing practices raises questions about nurses' ability to meet the demands of modern healthcare services. Examples from practice often reveal a low degree of autonomy among nurses, even in the immediate organization of healthcare services. Globally, nursing must evolve into an autonomous and equitable profession within the healthcare system to effectively drive positive changes. Despite numerous initiatives by nurses and higher education institutions, visible progress toward this goal has been limited (Živanović, 2021).

In essence, while nursing has made strides toward professional recognition and autonomy, substantial challenges persist in fully realizing its potential within the contemporary healthcare landscape (Henderson, 1978).

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evolution of nursing from its historical roots to its current state as a vital profession within modern healthcare systems underscores its enduring importance and potential for transformation. Nursing, founded on principles of compassion, care, and trust, has grown into a profession characterized by high levels of education, expertise, and moral integrity.

Throughout history, nurses have played a crucial role in caring for the sick and vulnerable, adapting to societal changes and advancements in healthcare. Yet, despite their invaluable contributions, nurses often face challenges regarding their autonomy and recognition within the healthcare system. Efforts to establish nursing as an autonomous profession capable of driving positive changes have been ongoing but are hindered by various factors, including societal perceptions and structural constraints.

To fully realize the potential of nursing and enhance its position within healthcare, concerted efforts are needed at multiple levels. This includes advocating for nursing autonomy, raising public awareness of the profession's capabilities, and providing nurses with opportunities for continuous education and professional development.

By empowering nursing through education, advocacy, and recognition, we can harness the full potential of this essential profession to transform healthcare quality and autonomy. Only through collaborative efforts and a collective commitment to nursing excellence can we ensure that nurses are able to fulfill their vital role in promoting health, preventing illness, and providing compassionate care to individuals and communities worldwide.

LITERATURE

- Becher, J., & Trowler, P. (2001). *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Cultures of Disciplines*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Čukljek, S. (2005). *Basics of health care: Manual for nursing studies*. Zagreb.
- Daly, J., Speedy, S., & Jackson, D. (Eds.). (2019). *Contexts of Nursing: An Introduction*. Sydney, Australia: Elsevier Australia.
- Egenes, K. J. (2017). History of nursing. In G. Roux & J. A. Halstead (Eds.), *Issues and trends in nursing* (2nd ed.). Burlington, MA, USA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Henderson, V. (1978). *The concept of nursing*. Journal of Advanced Nursing, New York.
- Knežević, D., Jović, D., & Egeljić, N. (2020). Positive and negative aspects of care. Zagreb.
- Marinić, R. (2016). Identity, integrity and autonomy of the nursing profession. Zagreb.
- Mason, D. J., Leavitt, J. K., Chaffee, M. W., & Outlaw, F. H. (2019). *Policy & Politics in Nursing and Health Care*. St. Louis, MO: Elsevier.
- Peličić, D. (2020). *Foundations of aspects of health care*. Health Care, Zagreb.
- Potter, P. A., Perry, A. G., Stockert, P. A., & Hall, A. M. (2021). *Fundamentals of Nursing*. St. Louis, MO: Elsevier.
- Prić, N. (2020). *Health care: Textbook*. School Book, Zagreb.
- Rosdahl, C. B., & Kowalski, M. T. (2017). *Textbook of Basic Nursing*. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer.
- Smith, A., & Jones, B. (2019). *Advanced Nursing Practice: Concepts, Issues, and Challenges*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Taylor, C., Lillis, C., Lynn, P., & LeMone, P. (2020). *Fundamentals of Nursing: The Art and Science of Nursing Care*. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer.
- Whitehead, D., & Maude, P. (2019). *Essentials of Nursing Practice*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Živanović, D. (2021). *Nursing profession in the modern health care system and public health: New roles and challenges*. Belgrade.
- Živanović, D. (2021). *Nursing Profession in the Modern Healthcare System and Public Health: New Roles and Challenges*. Belgrade.