

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND THE VALORIZATION OF NURSING

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On 17th May 2016, events held around Brazil marked the Day of Struggle for the Valorization of Nursing. Bill 2295/2000, which makes provisions regarding the 30 weekly working hours for nurses, the institution of the professional minimum wage, working conditions and the offering of undergraduate courses in the Distance Education mode, were some of the issues which permeated the discussions, articulated by the entities representing Brazilian Nursing, in different forums.

It would be unfair and unfounded to hierarquizate these issues, in the light of the profession's historical struggles; however, the more than 50,000 places available for distance training place this issue on the agenda of lecturers and coordinators of Undergraduate Courses in Nursing. What professionals do we need to train? Who would we like to attend us and our children at times of weakness? Is it possible that technical and human care can be learned purely through digital technologies? Can virtual platforms substitute "being taken in hand", that is, the teaching of a dedicated professor? How is one to teach the subtleties of professional care?

These queries are added to the innumerable challenges imposed by the aging of the population, the increase in chronic illnesses, the upsurge of infectious and opportunist illnesses, epidemics, the high technological impact on health opposing the needs of embracement, of access, and of continuity of the care.

Distance Learning has been used – both in Brazil and abroad – to expand access to higher education courses, professional improvement and continuing education - and as a pedagogical tool. Regarding Nursing, Distance Learning must be used in a complementary way. The use of virtual environments is highly interesting and could be a differential. In the processes of teaching and learning, the activities are undertaken in different times and places, and contribute to the development of autonomy, flexibility and creativity, mediated by the lecturer and the tutor. In this case, students and professors are called to review their roles in a perspective more of collaboration than subordination, which is a major lesson to be learnt.

Training in nursing conducted entirely at a distance has been viewed with temerity, less because it depicts the ignorance, in terms of training, of the investors who have been deprived of education, but because professional care involves distinct technical, scientific, technological, ethical and humanist knowledge, with major implications in the final result of peoples' health (professionals and service users), whether through actions of health promotion, prevention of ill health, or recovery of health.

A breath of hope came with concrete initiatives: Decree N. 8754, of 10th May 2016, which institutes the mandatory provision of an opinion on the part of the Brazilian National Health Council, prior to the decision of the Ministry of Education, in relation to the authorization for the creation of Nursing Courses, the result of an effort made by the Brazilian Association of Nursing. Another is Bill 2,891/2015, which prohibits the training of nurses and nursing technicians through training for which they do not have to be physically present, and which has already received a favorable opinion from the Education Commission; and, more recently, on the 2nd of June 2016, the approval, through the plenary of the National Health Council, of the prohibition of undergraduate courses and technical training purely through distance learning in the area of Health throughout Brazil.

Faced with these facts, it should be emphasized that the nature of the profession imposes certain conditions which include a specific number of hours in practice and placements, as nurses cannot be trained purely through distance learning. The use of this strategy, in a correct and complementary way, by the training schools, expresses the commitment to and responsibility for the society which we serve.

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