




ORIGINAL


## Nursing management in the hospital environment and the challenges for the professional practice

Gerenciamento de enfermagem no ambiente hospitalar e os desafios para o exercício profissional  
Gestión de Enfermería en el ambiente hospitalario y los desafíos para el ejercicio de la profesión


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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to analyze Nursing management in the context of the nurses' professional practice in a hospital environment. **Method:** a qualitative study carried out with 19 nurses from a reference hospital in Urgency and Emergency care from the inland of Paraíba, Brazil. Semi-structured interviews submitted to content analysis in the thematic modality proposed by Bardin were used as data collection technique. **Results:** three general categories were elaborated, namely: Nursing management in light of the Law of Professional Practice; Team sizing and appreciation of the Nursing work; and Permanent Education. Difficulties faced by the nurses in their work process were identified, linked to inadequate sizing of Nursing professionals. **Conclusion:** management in the hospital environment focuses on the nurses' professional practice and presents itself as a multifaceted phenomenon, imbricated in a structure of political, ethical, legal, institutional, professional and human relationships with reflections on the care process in Nursing.

**Descriptors:** Management. Professional Practice. Nursing. Hospitals. Education, Continuing.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** analisar o gerenciamento de enfermagem no contexto do exercício profissional do enfermeiro em um ambiente hospitalar. **Método:** estudo qualitativo realizado junto a 19 enfermeiros de um hospital de referência em urgência e emergência, no interior da Paraíba, Brasil. Utilizou-se como técnica de coleta de dados entrevistas semiestruturadas submetidas à análise de conteúdo na modalidade temática proposta por Bardin. **Resultados:** elaborou-se três categorias gerais: O gerenciamento em Enfermagem à luz da Lei do Exercício Profissional; Dimensionamento da equipe e a valorização do trabalho em enfermagem; e Educação permanente. Identificou-se dificuldades enfrentadas pelos enfermeiros no seu processo de trabalho ligadas ao dimensionamento inadequado dos profissionais de enfermagem. **Conclusão:** o gerenciamento no ambiente hospitalar incide no exercício profissional do enfermeiro e se apresenta como fenômeno e multifacetado, imbricado numa tessitura de relações políticas, éticas, legais, institucionais, profissionais e humanas com reflexos sobre o processo cuidar em enfermagem.

**Descritores:** Gerenciamento. Prática Profissional. Enfermagem. Hospitais. Educação Continuada.

### RESUMÉN

**Objetivo:** analizar la gestión de Enfermería en el contexto de la práctica profesional de los enfermeros en un ambiente hospitalario. **Método:** estudio cualitativo realizado con 19 enfermeros de un hospital de referencia en Urgencias y Emergencias del interior de Paraíba, Brasil. La técnica de recolección de datos empleada consistió en entrevistas semiestructuradas sometidas a análisis de contenido en la modalidad temática propuesta por Bardin. **Resultados:** se elaboraron tres categorías generales, a saber: La gestión en Enfermería de acuerdo con la Ley de la Práctica Profesional; Dimensionamiento del equipo y valorización del trabajo en Enfermería; y Educación permanente. Se identificaron dificultades enfrentadas por los enfermeros en su proceso de trabajo ligadas a la inadecuada cantidad de profesionales de Enfermería. **Conclusión:** la gestión en el ambiente hospitalario incide en la práctica profesional de los enfermeros y se presenta como un fenómeno multifacético, imbricado en una estructura de relaciones políticas, éticas, legales, institucionales, profesionales y humanas con repercusiones en el proceso de atención en Enfermería.

**Descritores:** Gestión. Práctica Profesional. Enfermería. Hospitales. Educación Continua.

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, management represents an important tool in health work and has repercussions in decision-making by the professionals that affect the structure, production process and product of a system, in order to enable means to provide care to the users.<sup>(1-2)</sup> In the context of the health team, the management process becomes indispensable across the various health care settings, given the advances of the contemporary world and the adoption of new technologies, knowledge, theories and procedures involved in this field.<sup>(2)</sup>

Nurses stand out as indispensable team members at the front line across the health services, representing the largest workforce in the world and playing a vital role in the goal of attaining universal health coverage by 2023, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>4</sup> The year 2020 was considered the commemorative milestone of Nursing and Midwifery professionals in the fight to advocate towards greater investments for the category and improvements in their working conditions and education<sup>3-4</sup>.

In the hospital environment, the nurse's managerial role implies the articulation between the nurse's care and managerial processes, focusing on the user's needs and improvements in the working conditions for these professionals. To such end, investments are made in tools such as planning, leadership, communication, people and resource management and teamwork, seen as indispensable requirements in the professional practice for participatory and integrated management, moving away from the traditional model based on strict hierarchical structures of control and submission to institutional norms.<sup>(5-6)</sup>

The Law of Professional Practice (*Lei do Exercício Profissional*, LEP) (No. 7,598/867)<sup>7</sup> regulates the Nursing practice in Brazil and indicates the role of nurses, nursing technicians, nursing assistants and midwives across the health services, according to the qualification levels. In the management field, the Law mentions that it is exclusively up to the nurse to organize and lead the Nursing services, including their planning, execution and evaluation.

With this prerogative as a starting point, Nursing management is understood as a method capable of organizing the work process, aiming at and optimizing Nursing care, articulated with the Systematization of Nursing Care (SNC).<sup>(8)</sup> When exercising their care and managerial duties, nurses make decisions, interact with other professionals, supervise the Nursing team and assist users and families, in addition to planning and executing the care process.

In the nurses' daily practice, managerial work has repercussions in the autonomy degree of the Nursing manager and in how their relationship with the professionals takes place, taking into account the ethical-legal norms and instruments of the institution, either public or private.<sup>(9)</sup> Such actions and activities are grounded on the training of skills and abilities that are unique to these workers, in consonance with the LEP.<sup>(7)</sup>

However, there are still obstacles and challenges regarding the relationship of domination and obedience to rules, planning and verticalized and centralized decision-making, with a consequent discouragement of workers to participate in decisions, revealing a tendency towards bureaucratization of the Nursing work process.<sup>(8-10)</sup> An integrative review on the management of Nursing care in the hospital context evidenced a nurses' practice focused on bureaucratic activities and scarcely articulated with care, reinforcing the importance of articulation and integration between management and care as indispensable in this scenario.<sup>(11)</sup>

A study on the nurses' perception about their managerial role noticed challenges found in the management of the Nursing service, such as the lack of human resources, the responsibilities, the financial difficulties at the institution and the issue of professional preparation. It found that, in general, nurses do not have clear knowledge about their managerial competences and their role in the service.<sup>(10)</sup>

In addition to the demands related to management of the sectors, in most cases, nurses deal with excessive bureaucratization and lack administrative support. In addition to that, there are other obstacles such as reduced number of professionals, precariousness of the work relationships, lack of inputs and large number of users, which reflect in the Nursing practice and in the team's context.<sup>(5,8)</sup>

Thus, considering the complexity and challenges inherent to the nurses' managerial work in the hospital environment, the question is: How does Nursing management take place in the context of the nurses' professional practice in the hospital environment? Therefore, the objective was to analyze Nursing management in the context of the nurses' professional practice in a hospital environment.

## METHOD

An exploratory and descriptive study with a qualitative approach carried out in a large hospital located in the inland of the state of Paraíba, Brazil. Choice of this service favored the fact that it belonged to the public network, being a regional reference in health care in the Urgency and Emergency area and having a considerable number of nurses in its professional team, a prerogative for the phenomenon investigated.

The research conception and design process followed the recommendations set forth in the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ), which provides relevant guidelines on the qualitative approach.<sup>(12)</sup>

The stage to select the participants took place through convenience sampling and the theoretical saturation criterion,<sup>(13)</sup> seeking to involve the largest number of professionals across the different sectors of the hospital unit (emergency room, clinics and surgical center, among others). The following inclusion criterion was established: being a nurse

with at least one year of experience in the hospital service; and the exclusion criteria were as follows: being on vacation or sick leave during collection or not being found at the workplace.

Thus, a final number of 19 participants was obtained: four from the emergency room and reception sector, three from the medical clinic, three from the surgical clinic, three from the intensive care unit, one from the materials and sterilization center and two from the infected patient unit.

Data collection took place from January to March 2014, through prior contact with the hospital management and the Nursing coordination office, explaining details about the research. Subsequently, the participants were sensitized. A semi-structured interview was used, mediated by the script of questions prepared by the researchers, covering sociodemographic and educational aspects of the participants and issues referring to the managerial and professional practice, the study object in question.

The interviews took place at the hospital in a reserved room, avoiding interference in the environment and/or from other people, and they were recorded with the aid of a digital voice recorder, lasting a mean of 10 minutes under the guidance of a member of the project. It is noteworthy that this stage took place with prior scheduling by the participants, favoring shifts and days with less flow in the service, according to their availability. The audio material produced in the recordings was transcribed in full and, at a second moment, the interviewees were able to read the text produced, making possible adjustments or additions.

In the analysis stage of the final corpus produced from the interviewees' statements, content analysis was used in the thematic modality proposed by Bardin,<sup>(14)</sup> which comprises the phases of pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results, inference and interpretation.

Karl Marx's contributions<sup>(15)</sup> on work and the postulates set forth in the Law of Professional Nursing Practice<sup>(7)</sup> were adopted as the theoretical-philosophical framework to analyze the results and to substantiate critical understanding on the nurses' management and work process in the hospital environment.

In compliance with the ethical recommendations of research with human beings, the research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Campina Grande, CAAE: 03652312.8.0000.5182. Ensuring the participants' anonymity, the letter "E" was used to name them in the excerpts from the statements, followed by a number representing the order in which the interviews were conducted; in addition, all signed the Free and Informed Consent Form.

## RESULTS

In relation to the participants' sociodemographic and educational profile, it was observed that most of the interviewees were female (68.42%), aged between 20 and 25 years old (47.36%), with time

since graduation of eight years (89.47%), one year of experience in management and six months of experience in Urgency and Emergency care; of these, 11 (57.89%) reported having attended a *latu sensu* graduate course in Urgency and Emergency care.

Following the stages of the analysis framework adopted<sup>(7)</sup> and the treatment of the corpus obtained in data collection, three thematic categories were established, namely: The Law of Professional Practice in the context of Nursing management; The dilemma of team sizing; and Qualifying to manage: possibilities for permanent education in health.

### The Law of Professional Practice in the context of Nursing management

With regard to the knowledge necessary for the nurses' managerial role in the hospital environment, the interviewees highlighted the importance of the Law that regulates the Professional Nursing Practice and the benefits of its application in Nursing management. In addition to that, they mentioned that application of the Law contributes to the quality of Nursing care, as well as to autonomy and social recognition, as exemplified in the following statements:

The Law makes it very clear what the nurse's role is, the role of the technician and formerly the assistant, so it helps a lot, I think it's great (E9).

The Law is broad, but the interesting thing is to apply it. In the Law, everything is very beautiful, but if we don't apply it, we end up suffering the consequences and the patient is not treated properly (E10).

Most of the nurses point to challenges faced, such as difficulties in daily application of the Law of Professional Practice, especially regarding the Nursing professionals' duties:

The Law has many gaps in relation to the profession. We could be more contemplated or at least it could work because we see a lot on paper, but it leaves a lot to be desired in the practice (E5).

The Law is important to guide the work and to support nurses in the workplace (E6).

We know that there is chaos here, and the Law is a way for us to prevent ourselves, although the suggestions are not very supportive (E3).

The participants also mentioned the relevance of the role of the professional bodies (Regional Nursing Councils), alleging the lack of effective supervision by them, even in the scope of exercising the profession and complying with the law.

### The dilemma of team sizing

A challenge mentioned by the study participants in the context of Nursing management was the sizing of the Nursing team related to the insufficient number of professionals, given the high demand of



patients; a fact that negatively affects the quality of the care provided, leading to work overload, as shown in the following statements:

We have all the support of exams, that part is not a problem for us... We suffer more from this number, this exacerbated demand, because there is no other service that provides this local assistance (E2).

The problem here is that there are few professionals for many patients and according to the law, for this environment, there should be one technician for every two patients and many times this is not the case (E1).

[...] there are not enough professionals (E7).

Sizing of the Nursing personnel was considered as a dilemma that reflects on the way of organizing and providing the service.

### **Qualifying to manage: possibilities for permanent education in health**

The understanding of qualification in the context of Nursing management, considering permanent education in health, emerged as an opportunity to reflect on the problems arising from the professional practice, with a view to identifying and correcting possible failures during performance of the practices.

The difficulties found here refer to the lack of training (E3).

I think that there are people with certain habits that make it difficult for the service to proceed (E1).

What is lacking here is more training, more guidelines and a better view of each Nursing professional so that there is greater autonomy and good harmony among the team members (E6).

The interviewees report that the educational process is necessary for development and updating of the professionals, contributing to autonomy and to a better relationship among the team members.

## **DISCUSSION**

Hospital work requires new competences from nurses who are faced with technological changes, innovations and demands from their clientele, most of the times causing changes in their work process. In this scenario, these professionals resort to administrative instruments to manage: planning, organization, coordination and control, where quality depends on the performance of qualified human and material resources, adequate to the demand in health.<sup>(5,9)</sup>

Although management is acknowledged as an important cornerstone in the nurses' practice, the social division of work logic is still reproduced in Brazil, when establishing the idea that the Nursing team involves the figures of the nurse, the nursing technician and the midwife.<sup>(16)</sup> The LEP represents a way to assess accountability in the professionals'

actions based on the technical, ethical, political or relational competences of each of them.<sup>(7)</sup>

In the current study, it was noticed that the participants signal application of the LEP as an indispensable prerogative for the work performed in the hospital, by defining the duties of each member of the Nursing team, as well as reinforcing the nurses' performance in the managerial context of the service, so as to assume responsibility for the actions and activities within their competence. To such end, the role of the Regional Nursing Councils in the systematic monitoring of compliance with the legislation and regulations involving the professional practice of the category was emphasized.

Another aspect evidenced in the nurse's managerial practice involves the Systematization of the Nursing Care process, either through Nursing management or even in the management of user care, so that the professionals reassert their leadership role in the hospital environment.<sup>(17)</sup> It is known that leadership has been an important requirement in the Nursing practice and that it reflects on the quality of the work relationships between the Nursing team and other professions in the service.<sup>(18-19)</sup>

Although changes in Nursing management in the hospital environment are identified, with the advances in the Information and Communication Technologies, the adoption of electronic medical records and other support tools, a study on Nursing leadership in hospitals identified the existence of barriers to the theory and practice of leadership by the nurse in this service.<sup>(2)</sup> This reality affects the bureaucratization of public services, the organizational culture, the relationships between team members and the lack of skill and technique for leadership on the part of the professionals.

Sizing of the Nursing team emerges as a dilemma faced by the professionals in the hospital environment. In a conflicting way between legality and professional practice, the participants confirm the numerical and qualitative insufficiency of human resources for the Nursing service. It is understood that such team inadequacy compromises care quality and exerts a negative impact on workers' health,<sup>(21-22)</sup> especially in the Urgency service sector, which is proved to be one of the difficult areas in the nurses' performance, given the ambiguous situations of present feelings and emotions.<sup>(23)</sup>

A study on Nursing personnel sizing in a care unit for adults in Paraná concluded that this professional category is undersized, especially regarding nurses, which weakens care management and exerts a negative impact on the assistance provided.<sup>(24)</sup>

The problem of Nursing undersizing reflects the current economic model in Western societies, which favors precariousness of the work relationships across the different sectors.<sup>(25)</sup> On the one hand, there is an increase in the productive workforce and greater added value of the workers and, on the other, a significant reduction in the number of professionals.<sup>(15)</sup>

The production process of the Nursing work refers to a broader view not only of aspects related to the physical conditions (heat, noise, posture and lighting,

among others), found across the various hospital sectors, but also to the workers' related living conditions, their personal experiences, family, wage and their understanding of work, among others.<sup>(15)</sup>

Hierarchization between the health professions and the symbolic knowledge and power relations instituted by them, according to qualification levels, favors the dialectic of objective and subjective labor distinction and/or exploitation modalities, thus producing "classes", or professionals, dominant and dominated, reproduced in the hospital context where Nursing is inserted.<sup>(15)</sup>

In the structure of Hospital Nursing, it is assumed that the workforce is capable of developing simpler or more complex functions, as well as ranking their value and also establishing a wage scale.<sup>(27)</sup> In this context, a series of issues related to the precariousness of the Nursing work is noticed, with the replacement of nurses by mid-level professionals, considering that this is a more economical workforce that feeds the added value process, or even the performance of activities or procedures that are not their responsibility.<sup>(15,26)</sup>

Nursing management and care management by nurses itself are activities that require time from the professionals. Managing encompasses the dynamic and systematic use of tools such as communication, leadership, planning, supervision, assessment and notes, in addition to others that are not always predictable, as they imply interaction geared to specific needs in each case.<sup>(27)</sup>

As a way of overcoming challenges, the nurses in the study identified the educational process as a strategic resource for the transformation of the professional training and improvement process. From this understanding, greater appreciation is achieved in their work process by means of an innovative praxis through the action of reflection and the subjects' conception of the way of creating facing the multiple dimensions of the health practices.<sup>(28)</sup>

Permanent education in Nursing is understood as a process of integral development of Nursing professionals, through a continuous teaching-learning method, providing workers with new knowledge in order to raise collective awareness to act at work and in society.

The following are pointed out as study limitations: the clipping performed in a single public hospital and the fact that the approach used does not allow generalizations to other settings, despite presenting similarities with other national realities. It is understood that the findings contribute important elements to the debate on Nursing management, highlighting challenges related to the nurses' professional practice.

## CONCLUSION

Management in the hospital environment focuses on the nurses' professional practice, presenting itself as a multifaceted phenomenon, imbricated in a structure of political, ethical, legal, institutional, professional and human relationships that affect the process of the Nursing care provided. Adequate sizing of the Nursing team and greater investments in the

qualification of nurses in the managerial and leadership fields emerge as aspects to be prioritized by the service.

The need for greater monitoring by the professional bodies is reinforced, as well as the adoption of educational actions with the Nursing services, in order to strengthen the performance of nurses, of the team and of the institution itself with regard to guaranteeing and maintaining healthy work environments.

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