Evaluation of the curricula of undergraduate nursing courses on the theme of Palliative Care

Avaliação dos currículos dos cursos de graduação em enfermagem na temática Cuidados Paliativos

Evaluación de los planes de estudio de los cursos de pregrado en enfermería en el tema de Cuidados Paliativos

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ABSTRACT
The current scenario in Brazil of undergraduate nursing training on the topic of Palliative Care is seen as insufficient. In most undergraduate courses, the subjects that address the topic are elective and Palliative Care is approached from a perspective limited to bioethics. The nurse has a fundamental role as a therapeutic instrument in the provision of Palliative Care. The objective of this study was to evaluate the curricular matrices of Undergraduate Nursing courses in the Médio-Paraíba Region in relation to the Palliative Care discipline. This is a qualitative and quantitative research carried out through content analysis of the curricular matrices of undergraduate Nursing courses in Educational Institutions in the Médio-Paraíba Region of the State of Rio de Janeiro. This study showed that most institutions that offer a degree in Nursing, 10 (56%) do not offer the Palliative Care discipline, 1 (5%) institution offers it electively and 6 (39%) the discipline is offered permanently in its curriculum matrix. There is a perceived.
need to build an educational process in Palliative Care, which will contribute not only to reflection on issues regarding the care of people with life-threatening illnesses, as well as their families, but also enabling changes in the way of caring and thinking about the terminality process.

**Keywords:** palliative care, nursing, nursing education.

**RESUMO**

O cenário atual no Brasil da formação de graduação em enfermagem na temática Cuidados Paliativos é visto como insuficiente. Na maioria dos cursos de graduação, as disciplinas que abordam o tema são eletivas e os Cuidados Paliativos são abordados sob uma perspectiva limitada à bioética. O enfermeiro tem um papel fundamental como instrumento terapêutico na prestação de Cuidados Paliativos. O objetivo deste estudo foi avaliar as matrizes curriculares dos cursos de Graduação em Enfermagem da Região Médio-Paraíba em relação à disciplina Cuidados Paliativos. Trata-se de uma pesquisa quali-quantitativa realizada por meio de análise de conteúdo das matrizes curriculares dos cursos de graduação em Enfermagem de Instituições de Ensino da Região Médio-Paraíba do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Este estudo evidenciou que a maioria das instituições que oferecem a graduação em Enfermagem, 10 (56%) não oferecem a disciplina de Cuidados Paliativos, 1 (5%) instituição a oferece de forma eletiva e 6 (39%) a disciplina é oferecida de forma permanente em sua matriz curricular. Percebe-se a necessidade de construção de um processo educativo em Cuidados Paliativos que contribua não só para reflexão sobre questões relativas ao cuidado de pessoas com doenças que ameaçam a vida, bem como de seus familiares, mas também possibilite mudanças na forma de cuidar e pensando no processo de terminalidade.

**Palavras-chave:** cuidados paliativos, enfermagem, educação em enfermagem.

**RESUMEN**

El escenario actual en Brasil de formación de pregrado en enfermería en el tema de Cuidados Paliativos se considera insuficiente. En la mayoría de los cursos de pregrado, las materias que abordan el tema son optativas y los Cuidados Paliativos se abordan desde una perspectiva limitada a la bioética. La enfermera tiene un papel fundamental como instrumento terapéutico en la prestación de Cuidados Paliativos. El objetivo de este estudio fue evaluar las matrices curriculares de las carreras de Graduación en Enfermería de la Región de Medio Paraíba en relación a la disciplina de Cuidados Paliativos. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa y cuantitativa realizada a través del análisis de contenido de las matrices curriculares de los cursos de graduación en Enfermería en Instituciones Educativas de la Región Medio-Paraíba del Estado de Rio de Janeiro. Este estudio demostró que la mayoría de las instituciones que ofrecen la carrera de Enfermería, 10 (56%) no ofrecen la disciplina Cuidados Paliativos, 1 (5%) institución la ofrece de manera electiva y 6 (39%) la disciplina se ofrece de manera permanente en su matriz curricular. Se percibe la necesidad de construir un proceso educativo en Cuidados Paliativos, que contribuya no sólo a
la reflexión sobre cuestiones relativas al cuidado de las personas con enfermedades potencialmente mortales, así como a sus familias, sino que también permita cambios en la forma de cuidar y pensando en el proceso de terminalidad.

**Palabras clave:** cuidados paliativos, enfermería, educación en enfermería.

1 INTRODUCTION

Palliative care (PC) was defined in 1990 and revised in 2002 by the World Health Organization (WHO) as care provided by a multidisciplinary team with the aim of improving the quality of life of patients and their families in the face of a life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering and the treatment of pain and other physical, psychosocial and spiritual symptoms. (SOARES, et al., 2024; SOUZA et al., 2022).

Given this important theme, Gonçalves et al (2019) highlight the need for nurses to understand Palliative Care, since they are professionals who promote care throughout the life cycle. This will require them to have a humanistic view of the needs of patients and their families, as well as self-control and commitment to promoting quality of life and relieving suffering, which are the main objectives of care in Palliative Care (SILVA, et al., 2023).

To this end, it is necessary for nurses to have content related to Palliative Care in their training, a weakness portrayed in other studies that show that the subject is not widely expressed in academic curricula, reflecting in the professional's deficient practices within this context (GONÇALVES, 2023). Thus, the need for this knowledge to address human needs emerges, transcending professionals in a greater sensitization in assisting the person without the possibility of a cure and helping to promote the quality of life of the entire family nucleus (RIBEIRO et al., 2019).

The current scenario in Brazil for undergraduate nurse training on the subject of Palliative Care is seen as insufficient. In most undergraduate courses, the subjects that deal with the topic are electives and Palliative Care is
approached from a perspective limited to bioethics, excluding important aspects such as pharmacology, multidisciplinarity, integrality and the experimentation of real situations (RIBEIRO et al., 2019).

In order to support and clarify the type of care provided by Nursing to patients under Palliative Care, the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN) has updated the Nursing Code of Ethics, according to Cofen Resolution No. 564/2017, which in its Article 48 describes among the duties of nurses the need to provide nursing care promoting the quality of life of the person and family in the process of being born, living, dying and mourning.

Thus, it is understood that it is the nurse's duty to be technically prepared to offer all the palliative care available to the patient and family under Palliative Care, exercising their role autonomously within a multidisciplinary team.

The competencies to be developed by a professional are related to the essence of the profession. For Nursing, the act of caring is the guiding principle of actions, and in the context of Palliative Care, caring means providing comfort, acting and reacting to situations of death and dying, valuing suffering and committing to actions to preserve physical, moral, emotional and spiritual integrity, being flexible, empowering care in all its breadth and advocating for the patient, recognizing them as a unique being (FIRMINO, et al., 2022).

In this context, the role of nurses in Palliative Care is emphasized, as they provide care to patients and their families through the systematic assessment and management of the signs and symptoms presented, seeking, together with the multidisciplinary team, to relieve suffering by establishing the priorities of each individual being cared for. (HEY et al., 2021).

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN) for Undergraduate Nursing Courses, established by CNE/CES Resolution No. 3 of 2001, the professional qualified to practise nursing should have the following competences: critical, reflective capacity, capable of knowing and intervening in health-disease problems and situations, identifying the biopsychosocial dimensions of their determinants. They must also act with a sense of social
responsibility and commitment to citizenship, promoting the integral health of the human being.

This study is justified, considering data discussed in studies that have shown the publication of "The Economist", which in 2010 and 2015, evaluated the "The Quality of Death Index". This publication is based on a survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit, which ranks 40 countries (in 2010) and 80 countries (in 2015) on the quality and availability of palliative and end-of-life care. The 2015 analysis assessed the following indicators: health and palliative care environment; access to palliative care; quality of services; and societal engagement (BARBOSA DO NASCIMENTO, 2023). Brazil came 38th and 42nd respectively in this ranking, showing the lack of knowledge on the subject and consequently impacting on the quality of care provided to patients and families in need of Palliative Care. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand lead the way in terms of investment in health, infrastructure, knowledge and awareness of palliative and end-of-life care (PEIXOTO, et al., 2020).

In order to answer this question, the aim of the study was to evaluate the curricular matrices of undergraduate nursing courses in the Médio-Paraíba region in relation to the provision of palliative care.

The choice of region is justified because it is a representative region in the context of our country, which offers quality undergraduate nursing courses, reflecting the care provided to users.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative-quantitative study carried out by analyzing the content of the curricular matrices of undergraduate nursing courses at face-to-face and semi-presential educational institutions located in the Médio-Paraíba region of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

The Médio-Paraíba Region in the state of Rio de Janeiro is made up of the following municipalities: Barra do Piraí, Barra Mansa, Itatiaia, Pinheiral,
Piraí, Porto Real, Quatis, Resende, Rio Claro, Rio das Flores, Valença and Volta Redonda. It is the second most dynamic hub of Rio de Janeiro's economy, second only to the northern region of the state (IBGE, 2023).

According to Ferreira (2015), the two research approaches - qualitative and quantitative - converge in many scientific studies. The defining element of which path to follow in this case is the context, establishing on which of the aspects greater emphasis will be placed. Both types of research complement the subject's understanding of the object being studied, and it is possible to approximate nomothetic and idiographic science, with a homogeneity of the approaches used and no real distinction between these perspectives, resulting in the interdependence of the approaches, which are actually complementary (BELO; MERCADO, 2022).

The data was obtained by searching the internet, on the e-MEC website, consulting the National Register of Higher Education Courses and Institutions (E-MEC, 2023) and then locating the registered and recognized institutions with undergraduate nursing degrees, searching for the email addresses of each one and analyzing the curricular matrices of undergraduate nursing degrees. We checked whether the subject of Palliative Care was included, and the type of course offered (permanent, elective or absent) (Figure 1).

The syllabuses were not analyzed, since most institutions do not make the PPC (Pedagogical Course Project) available on their websites.
3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The institutions were analyzed according to Table 1, specifying the municipalities in the Médio-Paraíba region of the state of Rio de Janeiro, the institutions that offer undergraduate nursing degrees in this region, the teaching modality within the undergraduate nursing degree and the provision of the Palliative Care subject:
Table 1. Municipalities, educational institutions with undergraduate nursing degrees and their respective teaching modalities, and provision of palliative care courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipalities</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Type of teaching</th>
<th>Offering the subject of Palliative care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barra do Piraí</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barra Mansa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itatiaia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinheiral</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirai</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porto Real</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quatis</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resende</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Claro</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio das Flores</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valença</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta Redonda</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: the authors - Legend: P= Permanent; E: Elective; A= Absent

According to Table 1, in the Médio-Paraíba Region, which includes 12 municipalities, 6 municipalities do not offer undergraduate nursing degrees and 6 do. There are a total of 18 institutions offering undergraduate nursing degrees in these 6 municipalities. Of these 18 institutions, 6 (33%) follow the face-to-face modality and 12 (67%) the semi-presential modality, as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. Absolute and relative frequency according to the institution’s teaching method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Education</th>
<th>fi (n)</th>
<th>Fr (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In person</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-presential</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors.

Regarding the provision of the Palliative Care subject, of the 18 institutions analyzed that offer undergraduate nursing degrees in the Médio-Paraíba region, the majority, 10 (56%) do not offer the Palliative Care subject
(Absent), 7 (39%) offer the subject on a permanent basis (P) and 1 (5%) offers it as an elective (E), as shown below in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offering the course</th>
<th>fi (n)</th>
<th>FR (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absent (A)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent (P)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elective (E)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors.

With this data, it is possible to see that the Médio Paraíba region of Rio de Janeiro, known for its cultural, historical and economic diversity, faces challenges in the training of nurses due to the lack of Palliative Care in many undergraduate nursing courses. Palliative care is a fundamental multidisciplinary approach to caring for patients with life-threatening illnesses, aimed at providing comfort and quality of life for both the patient and their family (GERVÁSIO et al., 2023).

The absence of this subject in the curriculum of nursing courses in the region studied has several negative consequences for the training of nurses (VOLPIN et al., 2022). Firstly, professionals may not be adequately prepared to deal with end-of-life situations, resulting in inadequate care that is insensitive to patients’ physical, emotional and spiritual needs (DA SILVA CARDOSO, 2023).

In addition, a lack of knowledge about palliative care can lead to unnecessary and invasive interventions, negatively impacting the patient's quality of life and increasing and prolonging their suffering. Nurses may also face difficulties in communicating with patients and their families, being unable to offer the emotional and spiritual support needed during this delicate period (CORREIA; PEREZ, 2022).

Another important aspect is the overload on the health system. Without an approach centered on the principles of Palliative Care, patients may repeatedly resort to aggressive treatments and futile therapies, as well as recurrent and prolonged hospitalizations, increasing costs for the health system.
and diverting resources that could be directed to other areas (VIDAL, et al., 2022).

The lack of awareness of palliative care can also contribute to the perpetuation of taboos and stigmas related to death and dying in society, making it even more difficult to accept and understand this natural process of life (BESERRA; BRITO, 2024).

Given these consequences, it is crucial that undergraduate nursing courses in the Médio Paraíba region of Rio de Janeiro recognize the importance of Palliative Care and include this subject in their curricula. This will not only guarantee more comprehensive and humanized training for future nurses, but will also promote a significant improvement in the quality of health care offered to the local population at such delicate and challenging times (ALVES; OLIVEIRA, 2022).

It is worth noting that this study did not assess whether the subject of palliative care is covered in other subjects offered by the institution. To this end, another study would be necessary in order to ascertain whether lecturers in other subjects address the topic.

4 CONCLUSION

Analyzing the institutions that offer undergraduate nursing degrees in the Médio-Paraíba region, we found that most of them do not offer the subject of Palliative Care in their curricula. Bearing in mind the importance of technical-scientific knowledge in this area for nurses and understanding the need to intervene in diseases that cannot be cured and are close to terminality, without nursing professionals adequately equipped to support and assist this population, the quality of life and care will be compromised for both patients and their families.

This study demonstrates the importance of educational institutions offering the subject of Palliative Care on a permanent basis, contributing to the training of nurses, not only in technical matters, but also in the knowledge and
development of skills from the perspective of the biopsychosocial view of the patient and family in Palliative Care.
REFERENCES


