



Received in
07-20-2020

Approved in
08-15-2020

How to cite this article

Dios-Aguado M.
[The year 2020: An
Inflection point for
World Nursing].
Hist enferm Rev
eletrônica [Internet].
2020;11(Especial):3-4.

The year 2020: An Inflection point for World Nursing

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Since ancient times, mankind has faced multiple collective diseases of an infectious nature, with rapid spread and high mortality rate. It was believed that such diseases, which were called plagues or pests, were the result of Divine Wrath, considered as a punishment from the Gods towards mankind⁽¹⁾.

At that time, the concept of epidemic meant visiting or arriving at some place, so that the first medical handbooks cataloged the diseases by natural cause “*nosēmata ek Phýsios*” or resulting from a visit “*nosēmata ek epidēmíēs*”⁽²⁾. Hippocrates (460-385 BC) collects the terms epidemic and endemic in his work entitled “The Epidemics”; it was him that established the miasmatic theory of the infectious disease⁽³⁾.

Nowadays, the Greek word *epidēmía* means an infection that spreads during a period of time through a concrete geographical area and simultaneously affects many people, a fact that implies an incidence level of the pathology higher than the expected, making the epidemiological study of a collective group a necessity in order to control the infection and to predict the possible epidemiological outbreaks. The pathology is considered a pandemic when it simultaneously affects mankind as a whole⁽⁴⁾.

If Hippocrates established the bases of Medical Science, Florence Nightingale introduced the principles of hygiene in her “Notes on Hospitals” handbook (1858) and, in “Notes on Nursing. What it is and what it is not” (1859), she promoted the concept of holistic care of the person and established the bases of contemporary Nursing, the science that allows helping vulnerable individuals in a dignified way, in conditions of equality, and with no distinction regarding creed or social class, discovering their needs and mitigating their deficits⁽⁵⁾.

Throughout history, epidemics have supposed a challenge for the health of humanity since, to a greater or lesser extent, all of them are related to relational conflicts among human beings (abuse of power, greed, exploitation, etc.) and, in turn, are related with the incessant flow of people, goods, and materials, which facilitates the spread of the agent responsible for the epidemic. It is even possible to argue that an invisible enemy violently attacks human beings when the natural setting is neglected, the environment is contaminated, and nature is plundered. In that exact moment, the microorganisms unleash their fury and an infectious disease triggers chaos in an established social system. Therefore, when human beings abusively exploit some territory without respecting its regeneration times, nature goes into a shock and a major infection forces to stop that model of society.

When observing the development of the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, responsible for COVID-19, we realize that the disease generates fear, anguish, and panic in the world population; in turn, it collapses the health systems in any corner of the planet, as well as it blocks the economy,

both at the local and international levels. All these facts evoke the mystic experiences and superstitions anciently originated by the plagues and pests, which predicted that the end of the world was near⁽⁶⁾. In the 21st century, people feel the same terror towards SARS-CoV-2, since the virus colonizes all individuals alike, regardless of social class, and triggers pathologies for which there are still no known treatments or vaccines.

Currently, Nursing gains special relevance, as the nurses are the ones who care for the most dependent and vulnerable individuals based on Nightingale's teachings⁽⁵⁾, thus having provided holistic and quality care for all the patients affected by Sars-CoV-2. The Nursing staff has managed to convey affection to the patients, caring for them in a safe manner, mitigating their pain, providing them safety and bringing them tranquility, even when isolated in the hostile hospital rooms, in the desolated large rooms of the health centers, or in their homes. In all those places, people have felt and appreciated the same commitment that Nightingale offered with her light to the wounded in the Crimean war⁽⁷⁾.

The concept of "Nursing care" promotes caring for the individuals in their whole dimension, addressing their biological, physical, psychic, and spiritual needs with or without a pandemic, lending a hand to the person based on their needs, ensuring holistic care in all life stages, even at its final moment, alone or accompanied by their relatives.

The collective applause that society has given to all the health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic encourages to continue advancing, but it is not enough. It is necessary to unite all the nurses' strength worldwide to claim the place we have attained as health professionals by means of training and research⁽⁸⁾, managing to provide quality assistance and care to people in any corner of the world, regardless of their economic level.

Let us turn 2020, the International Year of Nursing and Midwifery, into a point of no return to globally advocate the Nursing role, as well as the presence of Nursing in all the meetings, departments or ministries linked to the health policies.

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