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## Epidemics as perspectives to the professionalization of Brazilian nursing

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To think about the history of humanity and its relationship with diseases is to realize how long, close, and dynamic the coexistence among them has been. In some episodes, they come as easy to control and overcome; in other, they require great confrontations and mobilizations, given the proportions they can reach, as it is in the case of epidemics/pandemics.

In this way, the understanding of illness must necessarily be contextualized in its historical period. Regarding this, illnesses have already been linked to spirituality and, thus, seen as divine punishment imposed on human beings. At that time, care was aimed at the salvation of the soul. In another period, health practices had been supported by the miasmatic theory that advocated intervention in the environment through the cleaning/sanitation of urban spaces (streets, squares, houses) and the incineration of the deceased's belongings<sup>(1)</sup>. Nowadays, the Bacteriological Theory, arising with the technological development and from the discoveries of Pasteur and Koch, recognizes in the etiological agents – parasites, viruses, bacteria, and fungi – the causes of the diseases<sup>(2)</sup>.

Therefore, the emergence of epidemics/pandemics may be related to adverse living conditions, natural disasters, environmental aggressions, trade in goods and, more recently, globalization. To illustrate, it is worth mentioning the Justinian's plague, the bubonic plague, cholera, tuberculosis, smallpox, Spanish flu, typhoid, yellow fever, measles, AIDS, malaria, swine flu, dengue, zika, chikungunya and, at present, COVID-19. In common, they are similar in terms of indiscriminate socio-cultural infection and the possibility of resurgence.

Thus, the knowledge produced about these events derives from scientific research, the use of technology, funding, institutional partnerships, and exchange among researchers. Out of this, we get the certainty that the identification of the causative agents, the discovery of the pathophysiology, the drugs, the vaccines and the strategies for the combat demand collective efforts from researchers and research centers/agencies of control, seeming to have no frontiers<sup>(3)</sup>.

In Brazilian reality, the production of serums and vaccines began with the operation of the Instituto Vacínico Municipal (Municipal Institute for Vaccination), in Rio de Janeiro, in 1894. This initiative was followed by the foundations of the Instituto Serumtherapico (Serotherapy Institute), in São Paulo (1899), today, Instituto Butantan (Butantan Institute), and the Instituto Soroterápico Federal (Federal Serotherapy Institute) of Rio de Janeiro (1900), now the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ)<sup>(4)</sup>. Today, they are centers of proven excellence, in their respective areas, and have the Unified Health System as a partner to promote the health of our population.

These institutions drove the construction of the Brazilian sanitary thinking and in this trajectory, the Rockefeller Foundation, until the middle of the 20th century, added efforts. In the particularity of Nursing, these stand out: Parsons Mission, training of health visitors, operation of the Nursing School of the National Department of Public Health (Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública, DNSP), creation of the DNSP Nurse Service, cooperation with the Special Public Health Service (Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública, SESP), implementation of Nursing Schools and financial support (1942-1960), training of health human resources (Nursing Assistants and Midwives), granting of scholarships in the United States, etc<sup>(5)</sup>.

About the training of human resources in the Nursing field, the history of the profession has in the Florence Nightingale teachings its reference to professionalization. She took the lead in systematizing the Nursing teaching out of knowledge accumulated in trips to Rome, Egypt, Germany, and the Crimean War, in which she dedicated herself to the surgical patient and the prevention/control of infections. Aside from the legacy of the nightingalean system, which is widespread and accepted worldwide, Florence Nightingale holds the pioneering role of First Epidemiologist Nurse and First Theorist Nurse (Environmental Theory)<sup>(6)</sup>.

As for the professionalization of Brazilian Nursing, we know that it occurred in the transition from the 19th to the 20th centuries and that the field of public health, in times of outbreaks and epidemics, projected its greatest perspectives, given that completing the health visitor course granted credits to study in Nursing Schools. In more distant times, they were inserted in governmental actions of reactive characteristics in the combat and control of epidemics and later, in closer times, as participants in the means of action and training of human resources. Thus, the nurses, previously under temporary contracts for working in public institutions, became part of the functional staff of the hygiene and health services. At that point, with adequate qualification and suitable remuneration, they assumed the leading role in educational and disease prevention actions and occupying spaces in reference services<sup>(7)</sup>.

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that since the beginning of professionalization, Nursing has been attentive to the various illness phenomena, remaining connected to scientific discoveries, as well as contributing to health sciences with studies and publications related to good health practices, qualified care assistance, and patient safety.

In this way, health care has become a great ally in the fight and control of diseases. We have seen, therefore, that technologies have given a new configuration to care and that professional qualification is an important requirement for its practice. Faced with this, the Nursing team, aware of its responsibilities and willing to assume its main role, has adopted a vigilant attitude to the care process and remains alert to new requests. It has been this way in the basic care by assuming a prominent position in the fight and control of epidemics/pandemics (yellow fever, tuberculosis, malaria, smallpox, etc.) and in-hospital care, in a scenario of greater complexity such as those required in the worsening of AIDS, influenza A (H1N1) and, currently, in the treatment of COVID-19.

Finally, in this trajectory, the pioneering nurses – all deserving of recognition – were of vital importance to the construction of knowledge about care, as well as to the consolidation of nursing processes and the broadening of professional horizons. This commitment and attention have given them, at many times, a professional life overloaded by the accumulation of functions, among which: administrative, teaching, assistance, and head of organizations/associations of the Nursing.

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