

Contemporary nursing: objectives and tasks

Jolanta Górajek-Jóźwik

Department of Nursing Theory, Faculty of Nursing and Health Science, Skubiszewski Medical University, Lublin, Poland

Abstract: The objectives, tasks and possibilities of contemporary practically- theoretically oriented nursing is presented, together with consideration of the historical and prognostic context of nursing. The methods of content reflection and critical reflection are used. The general objectives and tasks of contemporary nursing are presented with regard to the mission it has to achieve in society, and the basic variables directly influencing nursing are highlighted. Particular attention is paid to nursing as a scientific discipline, and the meaning of the concept of *health* for the needs of nursing are shown.

Key words: nursing profession, nursing practice, nursing theory, health

INTRODUCTION

A relatively a long time ago, the nursing community stated that the concept of nursing should be understood as: the profession of a caring character (professional nursing care), and the subject lectured at various levels of education and training of nurses, as a young scientific discipline.

Nursing – initially in the USA, the birthplace of nursing thought and independent professional practice based on the results of studies of significant generalisations, and later in Europe – began to search for its own identity, independent of medicine. Through real interest and investment in nursing and practical nursing care, the creation of the practice and science of nursing became possible. The idea of performing individualized care to all those in need, including the healthy, those at risk from illness, the sick, and the disabled constituted the grounds for nursing.

The objective of this review is to present the essence of contemporary nursing, with particular emphasis on the theoretical bases which directly influence the scope and character of practical nursing. The prognostic and historical variables are taken into consideration, and the methods of content reflection and critical reflection are used.

Nursing – objectives and tasks. Nursing incorporates both practical and theoretical activities. This is the practice and knowledge that ‘integrates medical, biological, psychological and pedagogical elements’ [1]. Because of its ‘placement’ it has always connected with and used the significant care elements of nursing, medical and humanistic knowledge with manual-instrumental efficiency.

The tasks to be realized by contemporary nursing, including those a nurse, are coded in the mission that should be fulfilled in relation to society [2, 3].

Contemporary nursing encompasses the following areas of activity:

- participation in the creation and realization of national plans and programmes for health protection;

- promotion of high quality of nursing care and performing such care for healthy people at risk from illness, the sick and disabled; preparing society for taking increasing responsibility for their own health and life and of their relatives, or the health of close friends;
 - autonomous contribution to cooperation with representatives of other professions having a caring character;
 - identification of new and significant for nursing areas of research, participation in the realization of research, and appropriate using of the results obtained [4].
- The articulated tasks are translated into detailed aims which, in turn, give direction, scope and character to further interests and practical- theoretical activities.
- Systematic and realised over the years, the development of nursing resulted in the fact that we can now treat it as a profession. The following variables caused this situation:
- longer education period (exclusively at the academic level);
 - more extensive knowledge of nurses (concerning mainly nursing science);
 - preparation for participation in interdisciplinary research, initiating and carrying out of own research;
 - definite level of nursing independence.

The changes made recently in Polish nursing, mainly because of reorganization of health care system and the requirements of the European Union, are related to: widening of the field of practical activity (mainly in the area of social nursing), increase of research and development autonomy, and referring in practical nursing to the theory of nursing care [5].

Nursing as a profession. Has a long and rich tradition that dates back to 1860, to the name of Florence Nightingale. It has a caring character and consists in rational and professional assistance to all of those who are in need, with possibilities of using various solutions (methods) and forms of its performance.

Florence Nightingale, the author of modern and lay nursing, pointed out that nursing is an autonomous activity and relatively independent of other medical interventions [6]. In the definition of nursing adopted by the North American Nursing Association – the leader, and simultaneously the authority

Corresponding author: Dr. Jolanta Górajek-Jóźwik, Department of Nursing Theory, Faculty of Nursing and Health Science, Skubiszewski Medical University, Chodźki 6, 20-093 Lublin, Poland. E-mail: jolanta.gorajek@am.lublin.pl

Received: 18 May 2007; accepted: 30 June 2007

of global nursing (modified in 1962) – the independent role of nurse is stated. In subsequent years, the independence of nursing from medicine, and the independence of the nurse from the physician was documented, and cooperation rather than the subordination was definitely emphasized [7].

Rational, purposeful and planned nursing care promotes professional caring for individuals as a whole, together with everything surrounding them, and in supporting the individual, is a widely understood assistance. Contemporary nursing care is constructed on strong theoretical foundations. It definitely transcends the relatively narrow framework within which a nurse (and therefore also nursing care) was perceived as being exclusively performed according to medical orders and simple hygienic-ordering activities.

A nurse is prepared to take responsibility for the results of nursing care activities performed for individuals, communities, and the whole of society. When working with various categories of recipients of services and caregivers, a nurse is aware of the necessity for continuous improvement in practical nursing care, nursing care administration, teaching of nursing, commencing and realizing research studies. The latter result in the improvement of the quality of nursing care by investing in nursing as a scientific discipline.

The scope and character of practical nursing care results from the adoption of a definite theoretical approach, selected from among many possibilities, or developed for the needs of the nursing care subject, category of persons, or environments included in nursing care. It also considers the possibility of making choices within various nursing models (concept, theory) and nursing methods.

Nursing care, the domain of a nurse's work, in principle is practical and based on theoretical-philosophical and ethical-moral bases that give it its definite character. Contemporary nursing therefore becomes a research nursing based on facts. This is a theory that stimulates practice, a practice that looks for responses in the theory.

Nursing as a scientific discipline. The origins of contemporary nursing are strongly rooted in the vocational practice of nursing. To facilitate the transformation from a very comprehensively understood care performed by people with no special preparation, to considerations about nursing as a discipline¹, many changes of a developmental character had to be introduced, mainly in the awareness of nurses. It has been assumed that the essence of contemporary nursing should be considered and analysed from the historical and content-related perspective.

This relatively young discipline appeared from practical nursing care, and develops due to conscious derivation from the bases that were primary related to science, through making a systematic contribution to the practice in which it is possible to verify adopted arrangements. Contemporary nursing deals with the formulation of important questions for nursing and the content-related responses, including those related to the tasks that nursing has to perform for the transformation of society.

Nursing includes such issues as: direct care of the physically and mentally ill, the disabled of various ages and in different

surroundings. This is also health promotion and prophylaxis of diseases. The reactions (of individuals, families, social groups) to current and/or future, expected health conditions, are a subjects of special interest.

Contemporary nursing is concerned with having the studies and documented data to hand (for practical and theoretical needs) concerning: the objectives and assumptions (general – basic and detailed), methods of work, methodology and methods of research, adopted solutions and expected results. It is open to: promotion of own achievements, making use of the output of other disciplines – essential for the development of theory and practical nursing care, exchange of expertise for improving the quality of widely understood care, cooperation and collaboration for its own development, and for contributing to science.

A particular emphasis is placed on the possibility for carrying out research and introducing the results into practice, this includes results obtained from experimental research. It is true that only the consent for carrying out experimental research and making use of the results in practical nursing is evidence of the high level of autonomy. It has been assumed that the extent of respect for nursing autonomy (nursing care, nurse) is expressed in practice in the form of informed consent of one group to take up definite tasks by others within their own professional competences [9].

Health in practical-theoretical nursing. Many authors point to the referring of nursing to other disciplines, mainly to the social sciences. With the exceptional complexity of human identity and the multiplicity of disciplines dealing with life and health, this is nothing very special. Health (and illness) is not and cannot be the subject of interest of a single discipline, and thereby the representatives of the selected professional group.

Health and illness are concepts having various definitions and interpretations. The adoption of a specific definition results in consequences, among others in the form of direct influence on the practical and research spheres of a given discipline.

The question concerning nursing has always been connected with the question about health. Health and illness are the direct variables coexisting with nursing since its inception. The concepts and definitions adopted by nursing and concerning its role have evolved and have always been decidedly closer to health than illness.

Knowledge of health as the specific conceptual and significant category, on the basis and assumptions with regard to the idea of the concept, have resulted in the introduction of many changes in nursing. The basic ones include a clear shift of theoretical-practical interest in the care of ill patients to primary health care and health promotion, as well as changes in educational and training programmes for nurses.

SUMMARY

The changes taking place in individual regions in the world, in many countries, including mainly social, economic and ideological changes, give rise to new challenges and consequently, new tasks. These do not concern only nursing, but all of the disciplines that directly influence the health of people, the citizens of the world.

¹ In Poland the discipline is taught at the academic level. In 1986, in the list of fields and scientific disciplines, nursing was mentioned as a distinct item, and this had not changed in 1991. To date in legal Acts, such a record essential for Polish nursing, is lacking [8].

Consequently, nursing specifies general and specific objectives, defines new areas within which it looks for the response to the basic question to care. This is presented by nursing in a dynamic dimension that involves definite resources with relation to the size and importance of the problem.

Contemporary global nursing has the awareness of the need to answer the questions concerning mainly the essence of care, the essence of nursing, the concept of man – the subject of care, health, the contribution of nursing to people's health, the subject. The basic ideas that characterize nursing care have changed in time by influencing nursing directly. The awareness of these facts and possibility of studying them is of great theoretical and practical value for the nursing society. This means the possibility of referring to the 'philosophical' past, and studying its projection on the presence and future of nursing.

REFERENCES

1. Hutner R: Badania naukowe w pielęgniarstwie. *Pielęg i Potoż* 1975, 6, 11-13.
2. Lenartowicz H: Profesja, w której dopełniają się humanistyczne transakcje. *Pielęg i Potoż* 2001, 10, 5-7.
3. Lenartowicz H: Zagadnienia organizacji pracy pielęgniarstwa. In: Zahradniczek K. (Ed.): *Pielęg i Potoż*. Podręcznik dla studiów medycznych. Lek. PZWL. Warsaw 2004.
4. Górajek-Jóźwik J: Wprowadzenie do filozofii pielęgniarstwa. In: Górajek-Jóźwik J. (Ed.): *Filozofia i teorie pielęgniarstwa. Czelej*, Lublin 2007
5. Wrońska I: Idea i filozofia współczesnego pielęgniarstwa. In: Kawczyńska-Butrym Z. (Ed.): *Pielęg i Potoż* rodzinne. Teoria i praktyka. CEM. Warsaw 1997.
6. Wiewiórowska M: Humanistyczne teorie działania społecznego. *UMCS*. Lublin 1988.
7. Bevis EO: Nursing: what it is and how it evolved. In: Bower, FL, Bevis, EO. (Eds.): *Fundamentals of Nursing Practice. CV Mosby*, St Louis/Toronto/Londyn 1979.
8. Klamut M: Posłowie. In: Górajek-Jóźwik J: Rahela Hutner – prekursorka i organizatorka systemu doskonalenia i specjalizacji pielęgniarek. *Akadem Med*. Lublin 2003.
9. Bjørkøe JA: Pomoc dla samopomocy. Instytut Służby Społecznej. *Żak*. Warsaw 1997.