

Florence and the environmentalist theory: marks of history in the light of sociology of professions

Florence e a teoria ambientalista: marcos da história à luz da sociologia das profissões

Florence y la teoría del medio ambiente: marcos de la historia a la luz de la sociología de profesiones

ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on Florence Nightingale and her Environmental Theory as milestones of nursing as a profession and its relationships with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method: reflective text, elaborated in the light of the Sociology of Professions by Eliot Freidson. **Results:** three reflective categories were outlined, namely "Florence Nightingale: biographical aspects"; "The foundations for the construction of own knowledge and the credibility of nursing as a profession"; "Environmental Theory (1859) and pandemic COVID-19: continuities". **Conclusion:** a reflection on the contributions of Florence Nightingale and her Environmentalist Theory as milestones of nursing as a profession becomes a necessity, given the pandemic context, her legacy and her Theory have the power to resignify care of nursing.

Descriptors: Nursing Theory; Sociology; Nursing; History of Nursing; Pandemics.

RESUMO

Objetivo: refletir sobre Florence Nightingale e sua Teoria Ambientalista como marcos da enfermagem como profissão e suas relações com a pandemia da COVID-19. **Método:** texto reflexivo, elaborado à luz da Sociologia das Profissões de Eliot Freidson.

Resultados: foram delineadas três categorias reflexivas, sendo elas "Florence Nightingale: aspectos biográficos"; "Os alicerces para construção de conhecimento próprio e a credibilização da enfermagem como profissão"; "Teoria Ambientalista (1859) e pandemia COVID-19: continuidades". **Conclusão:** a reflexão, acerca das contribuições de Florence Nightingale e de sua Teoria Ambientalista como marcos da enfermagem como profissão, torna-se uma necessidade, uma vez que, diante ao contexto pandêmico, o seu legado e a sua Teoria têm potência para ressignificar o cuidado da enfermagem.

Descritores: Teoria de Enfermagem; Sociologia; Enfermagem; História da Enfermagem; Pandemias.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre Florence Nightingale y su teoría ambiental como marco histórico de la enfermería como profesión y su relación con la pandemia COVID-19.

Método: texto reflexivo, elaborado a la luz de la Sociología de las profesiones por Eliot Freidson. **Resultados:** se describieron tres categorías reflexivas, a saber, "Florence Nightingale: aspectos biográficos"; "Los fundamentos para la construcción del conocimiento propio y la credibilidad de la enfermería como profesión"; "Teoría ambientalista (1859) y pandemia COVID-19: continuidades". **Conclusión:** la reflexión sobre las contribuciones de Florence Nightingale y su teoría ambientalista como marco histórico de la enfermería como profesión, se convierte en una necesidad, dado que, en el contexto de la pandemia, su legado y su teoría tienen el poder de replantear la atención de la enfermería.

Descritores: Teoría de Enfermería; Sociología; Enfermería; Historia de la Enfermería; Pandemias.

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INTRODUCTION

The identity profile of professions and their histories have unique relationships with the history of humanity itself. In view of the path taken by nursing as a profession, the visibility, image and professional identity of nurses have been focused on studies in recent decades⁽¹⁾.

About the history of nursing, this discussion is relevant when considering that it has passed and still goes through a conceptual paradigmatic overcoming of what comes to be a female occupation, as an extension of the maternal and religious role, that features a profession that is built on knowledge/expertise, legitimization of the State through norms and that meets a social need⁽²⁾.

In this sense, the framework of professional nursing, recognized worldwide, is in the figure of Florence Nightingale. Born into an aristocratic family, she lived in Victorian England from 1820 to 1910. She stood out in the Crimean War (1856) for taking care of injured people and for a significant reduction in mortality from infection, documented through statistical data – “Florence Diagram”. From this immersion, the first nursing theory drew its foundations – Environmental Theory, which together with the creation of a Nursing School at St. Thomas Hospital (1860) reinforced the configuration of a new era: Modern Nursing/professional nursing⁽³⁾.

One of the characteristics of a consolidated profession in society is its visualization, especially as a social need⁽²⁾. It is understood as a process that legitimizes and is legitimized dialectically with the passage of time and according to the characteristics of the historical moment⁽⁴⁾. The COVID-19 pandemic has marked nursing with intense repercussion in social media, either for its care work with the population or for the constant struggle to be recognized as a science.

Considering nursing holds a *corpus* of specific and appropriate knowledge, which derives from Florence Nightingale framework of professionalization and her Environmental Theory as the first initiative of scientific theorization of nursing knowledge, we promote the opportunity to reflect on these milestones as riots for better visualization and understanding of the pandemic scenario of COVID-19.

Thus, the objective was to reflect on Florence Nightingale and her Environmental Theory as milestones of nursing as a profession and its relations with the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

This is a reflexive text, a historical perspective that uses documentary research as a method of investigation. This text was basically based on articles from scientific journals and classic books on the history of nursing and its conceptions, with no date limit of publication. Eliot Freidson's theoretical framework of Sociology of Professions was used, enabling reflections and contextualization of nursing practice in its various scenarios of health performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Florence Nightingale: biographical aspects

Florence Nightingale came from a family with economic, social and political power. This was constantly stressed and considered decisive for her achievements to be propagated. It can be said that this whole context supported the legitimation of nursing as a profession and also its visualization as a social need⁽²⁾.

Florence was born in Florence, Italy, during her parents' trip. It is noted the privileged basic education received from her family, since this was unusual for women of that time who, in general, were focused on domestic life. In addition to speaking several languages, she had contact with the universe of advanced mathematics, in which she stood out. The logical and objective thinking supported her to develop statistical calculations, in the proposition of the “Florence Diagram”, increasing her expertise in nursing in the territory of statistics and epidemiology⁽⁵⁾.

This differentiated education gave Florence Nightingale a plural look that was ahead of her time. She did not fit the standard expected for the noble woman of the 1800s in England. Her decision to become a nurse and go to the Crimean War was challenged by her family⁽⁶⁾.

The foundations for the construction of appropriate knowledge and validity of nursing as a profession

Undeniably, Florence Nightingale became a world landmark of professional nursing by rethinking the occupation of the caring woman in an educated perspective, with appropriate knowledge and validity in society. This period was known as Modern Nursing and the Crimean War (1856) was an important event for Florence to experience what would be the Environmental Theory (1859), arising the difference of having a nurse in situations of war, epidemic and pandemic.

The focus of Florence Nightingale's theory is the environment, understood as all external conditions and influences that affect the life and development of an organism, capable of preventing, suppressing or contributing to disease and death. The theory considers the disease as a restorative process of health and the nurse's role is to balance the environment to conserve the patient's vital energy and recover from the disease, prioritizing the provision of a stimulating environment of health development for the patient as the main role of nursing⁽⁷⁾.

Although the forerunner of Modern Nursing was a person that promoted the biomedical model, ensuring that nursing staff was subordinated to the physicians, her Environmental Theory is the first milestone of nursing knowledge theorization. In this sense, sociologist Eliot Freidson argues that a profession is constituted, among other elements, from appropriate knowledge that gives notoriety and scientific expertise⁽²⁾.

The institutionalization of knowledge is also understood as an important movement towards professionalization. Institutional history brings involves the design of knowledge constitution and deliberation processes through social relations between teachers and students⁽²⁾. Once again Florence Nightingale stood out when she created the nursing school at St. Thomas Hospital in 1860. Schoolnursing begins here, as well as the institutionalization of nursing knowledge⁽⁸⁾.

Florence Nightingale had an important role in the construction of nursing education, through her knowledge and practices related to the profession. The Nightingalean teaching model guided the process of institutionalization of formal knowledge worldwide, efforts in the field of teaching brought nursing and the scientific field closer.

Nursing historiography shows the constant search for social validation and knowledge legitimacy. The reflection based on the sociology of professions perspective allows us to identify the characteristics of professionalization in Nightingale's legacy.

The results of Florence efforts led to the displacement of the people who provided nursing care to the professional field, breaking with invisibility through recognizing the importance of care practice and approximations with professional accreditation.

Expertise in the field of self-knowledge, self-regulation and autonomy are profession credentials of Freidsonian theorization⁽²⁾. Thus, the

search for structuring nursing as a profession reflects in the development and deepening of specific knowledge that underly care practice, enabling to achieve quality of care and social recognition.

Florence Nightingale's expertise and contribution to nursing are the first milestone in the consolidation of appropriate knowledge, widely adopted in the daily practices of nursing professionals today. In times of pandemic, measures imposed reflect the Nightingalean legacy and allow the global visibility of the protagonists of care.

Environmental Theory (1859) and covid-19 pandemic: continuities

Florence Nightingale pointed out factors for maintaining a favorable environment to facilitate the healing process and healthy living⁽⁹⁾. Today, the theme of environmental health has been widely discussed through courses in both the health field and environmental sciences. Within an expanded view of health, it is necessary that professionals have a concern for the environment and its influences on human health. Environmental Theory, by analogy, spans centuries and becomes increasingly current.

Environmental issues are fundamental elements for individual and collective health. The spread of diseases is intertwined with the relationships between the environment and the person who falls ill or remains healthy.

The emergence of new diseases has impacts far beyond the cases and deaths they generate. They also create an ideal context that forces national public health systems to validate surveillance and health care for early detection and the cascading response power⁽¹⁰⁾.

Interestingly, Florence Nightingale's bicentennial year began with an overwhelming pandemic directly related to environmental issues such as quarantines, information and attitudes related to hygiene and social behavior. Nursing, like other health professions, is honored by the media and the population who are affected by measures to cope with the pandemic.

Florence, previously mentioned as one of the forerunners of science, is present today because social behavior, hygiene, ventilation, food and other items related to health and the environment emerge in the media and in people's daily lives. People are relearning that washing their hands is a premise to avoid illness!

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread throughout the world partly due to the delay in testing potential infected people, giving the results and isolating them, and because the failure to protect health professionals, which generated, and still does, viral dissemination and mutation, as well as the death of health workers. This is possibly the most serious pandemic in the recent history of humanity and its course can be better administered with more rigorous individual and collective behavioral measures⁽¹¹⁾. The reduction of transmissibility is achieved through three specific measures: protecting health professionals with personal protection equipment; identifying symptomatic people, testing them, giving the results quickly and isolating them; identifying communicators and quarantine them⁽¹²⁾. This is one of the faces of Environmental Theory!

Environmental Theory is rethought between the lines of routines, rules and proposals to cope with an illness that was not even discussed.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The construction of a professional identity for modern nursing goes together with the (dis)construction of stigmas. However, historicity must be unveiled, but never denied.

There's still a lot to achieve. Compared to the history of humanity, nursing and its history are still relatively recent. Talking about the history of nursing and its professional trajectory from its classical milestones is necessary for the recognition of the profession as one of the pillars of the relationship between health and the environment.

The limitation occurred mainly due to the scarcity of literature on Environmental Theory in the last five years, which made it difficult to contextualize this theory today.

This study contributes with reflections on the legacy of Florence Nightingale and environmental theory as a milestone of nursing as a profession that, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has the power to resignify nursing care.

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