

NURSING CONTRIBUTIONS TO CARE MANAGEMENT IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA ENFERMAGEM NA GESTÃO DO CUIDADO NA ATENÇÃO PRIMÁRIA À SAÚDE : UMA REVISÃO DE BIBLIOGRAFIA

CONTRIBUCIONES DE ENFERMERÍA A LA GESTIÓN DEL CUIDADO EN ATENCIÓN PRIMARIA DE SALUD: UNA REVISIÓN DE LA LITERATURA

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Primary Health Care (PHC), mainly structured through the Family Health Strategy (FHS), is the main entry point to the Unified Health System (SUS). In this context, nursing plays a central role both in care delivery and in care management. Given the structural and organizational challenges, this study aimed to analyze the contributions of nursing in care management within PHC.

Methodology: This is a descriptive study based on a literature review. Articles published in the last five years, in Portuguese, English, or Spanish, that addressed nursing management in PHC were included. The search was conducted in the Virtual Health Library (VHL), using the descriptors "Health Management," "Primary Health Care," and "Nursing," combined with

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the Boolean operator AND. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, nine studies were analyzed.

Results and Discussion: The studies indicate that nurses perform both care and managerial functions, playing a leading role in organizing services and leading teams. The main challenges include: work overload, insufficient management training, shortage of human and technological resources, and institutional barriers. Despite this, nursing demonstrates problem-solving capacity by using local strategies, accessible technologies, and active participation in decision-making.

Conclusion: Nursing plays a strategic role in PHC management, although it faces obstacles that affect the quality of care. Investing in management training, valuing professionals, and clearly defining their responsibilities are fundamental actions to strengthen PHC and SUS.

Keywords: Primary Health Care. Nursing Management. Nursing Contributions.

RESUMO

Introdução: A Atenção Primária à Saúde (APS), estruturada principalmente pela Estratégia Saúde da Família (ESF), é a principal porta de entrada do Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS). Nesse contexto, a enfermagem desempenha papel central tanto na assistência quanto na gestão do cuidado. Diante dos desafios estruturais e organizacionais, este estudo teve como objetivo analisar as contribuições da enfermagem na gestão do cuidado na APS.

Metodologia: Estudo descritivo, baseado em revisão de literatura. Foram incluídos artigos publicados nos últimos cinco anos, em português, inglês ou espanhol, que abordassem a gestão da enfermagem na APS. A busca foi realizada na Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde (BVS), com os descritores “Health Management”, “Primary Health Care” e “Nursing”, combinados com o operador booleano AND. Após critérios de inclusão e exclusão, nove estudos foram analisados.

Resultados e Discussão: Os estudos indicam que os enfermeiros acumulam funções assistenciais e gerenciais, sendo protagonistas na organização dos serviços e na liderança das equipes. Entre os principais desafios estão: sobrecarga de trabalho, insuficiência de formação em gestão, escassez de recursos humanos e tecnológicos e entraves institucionais. Apesar disso, a enfermagem demonstra capacidade de resolução, utilizando estratégias locais, tecnologias acessíveis e participação ativa nas decisões.

Conclusão: A enfermagem desempenha um papel estratégico na gestão da APS, embora frente obstáculos que afetam a qualidade do cuidado. Investir na formação de gestores, valorizar os profissionais e definir claramente suas responsabilidades são ações fundamentais para o fortalecimento da APS e do SUS.

Palavras-chave: Atenção Primária à Saúde. Gerenciamento de Enfermagem. Contribuições da Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La Atención Primaria de Salud (APS), estructurada principalmente por la Estrategia de Salud de la Familia (ESF), es la principal puerta de entrada al Sistema Único de Salud (SUS). En este contexto, la enfermería desempeña un papel central tanto en la

prestación como en la gestión de los cuidados. Dados los desafíos estructurales y organizativos, este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar las contribuciones de la enfermería a la gestión de los cuidados en la APS.

Metodología: Estudio descriptivo basado en una revisión bibliográfica. Se incluyeron artículos publicados en los últimos cinco años, en portugués, inglés o español, que abordaran la gestión de enfermería en la APS. La búsqueda se realizó en la Biblioteca Virtual de Salud (BVS) utilizando los descriptores "Gestión en Salud", "Atención Primaria de Salud" y "Enfermería", combinados con el operador booleano AND. Tras aplicar los criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se analizaron nueve estudios.

Resultados y Discusión: Los estudios indican que las enfermeras desempeñan funciones tanto asistenciales como de gestión, desempeñando un papel clave en la organización de los servicios y el liderazgo de equipos. Los principales desafíos incluyen la sobrecarga de trabajo, la insuficiente formación en gestión, la escasez de recursos humanos y tecnológicos, y los obstáculos institucionales. A pesar de ello, la enfermería demuestra su capacidad para resolver problemas mediante el uso de estrategias locales, tecnologías accesibles y participación activa en la toma de decisiones.

Conclusión: La enfermería desempeña un papel estratégico en la gestión de la APS, si bien enfrenta obstáculos que afectan la calidad de la atención. Invertir en formación en gestión, valorar a los profesionales y definir las estrategias adecuadas.

Palabras clave: Atención Primaria de Salud. Gestión de Enfermería. Contribuciones de Enfermería.

1 INTRODUCTION

Primary Health Care (PHC) in Brazil is configured from a priority organizational and care form: the Family Health Strategy (ESF), which is oriented as an articulation with life in the territories and has units distributed in the space, providing great capillarity and proximity to the population (Santos, Chinelli, and Fonseca, 2022).

In addition, PHC plays a fundamental role as a preferential gateway to the Unified Health System (SUS), in which it plays a role in the coordination of care, longitudinality and comprehensiveness of health care, as shown in the National Primary Care Policy (PNAB):

"Primary Health Care is configured as the first level of care in the Unified Health System and plays a fundamental role in the organization of care flows, in the problem-solving capacity of services and in the promotion of collective health..."

Health services, especially PHC, have been consolidated as one of the pillars for ensuring the quality of care provided to the population. It is observed that Brazilian public health, through the SUS, demonstrates important advances so that access and quality to health actions and services are contemplated (Silva, et al., 2022).

However, the growing organizational complexity of services, the pressure for efficiency, quality, and safety, the increase in care demands, technological advances, and the scarcity of resources characterize a challenge for service managers to guarantee care (Cancian, Cavalcante, and Pinho, 2023). It is notorious that social, economic, and technological transformations directly impact the management of health services and nursing, as the main profession at the forefront of SUS management, suffers impacts that are directly related to these actions (Machado, et al., 2023).

The professional nurse is characterized by his expanded role, which includes not only care activities, but also process and work management. Nurses emerge as a central agent in the articulation of care, being responsible for clinical, educational, and managerial actions that directly impact health indicators and user satisfaction (Machado and Perez, 2023).

In view of the challenges faced by health systems, it is essential to understand and value the contributions of nursing in the construction of problem-solving and humanized care and management practices. In this sense, the present study aims to analyze the contributions of nursing in the management of care in the context of Primary Health Care (PHC), highlighting its practices, challenges and potentialities.

In addition, the research seeks to contribute to the deepening of knowledge about the actions that nursing, as a profession, plays in the management of health services, with emphasis on PHC and the context of the Unified Health System (SUS), with the guiding question: what are the contributions of nursing in the management of care in Primary Health Care?

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study, with a literature review, following the steps established by Bezerra et al., 2024. For the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the following were defined: original or review articles published in the last 5 years in scientific journals, studies written in English, Portuguese or Spanish, studies that investigated the aspects of nursing management in PHC and studies that contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the theme.

Exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate studies that did not meet the objectives of the study. Studies that do not fit the criteria such as case reports, editorials, commentaries and studies with an exclusive focus on other issues related to the management of the health system were excluded. The search was carried out in the electronic database Virtual Health Library (VHL). The search terms were combined using the Boolean operator (AND) for the sensitivity of the search. The following keywords were included: "Health Management" AND "Primary Health Care" AND "Nursing"

After the initial search, the titles, abstracts and objectives were analyzed and evaluated according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that met the inclusion criteria were selected for full reading, while those that did not meet the criteria were discarded. The final sample included the most relevant and recent studies that contributed significantly to the understanding of the contributions of nursing in the management of care in PHC, totaling 9 selected articles (Table 1).

Table 1

Classification of the articles selected for the literature review

Title of Selected Study	Authorship/Year of Publication	Goals
<i>Co-management in primary</i>	Vendruscolo, Baldissera and	Mapping, reflecting and

<i>care: possibilities and challenges of a team in southern Brazil</i>	Zocche, 2025	predicting solutions to the managerial weaknesses of work in Primary Health Care from the perspective of co-management
<i>Nursing management associated with quality of care in primary health care: integrative review</i>	Gonçalves, et. al, 2024	To analyze the scientific evidence on the role of nursing management for the quality of care in Primary Health Care.
<i>Organization of the working process of the coordinators in the family health strategy management</i>	Geremia, et. al, 2023	OBJECTIVE: To analyze the organization of the work process of the coordinators of the Family Health Strategy (FHS) in a hub municipality in the western region of Santa Catarina.
<i>The management of Basic Health Units in the Jequitinhonha Valley: between national policy and regional action</i>	Pertili, et al., 2023	To problematize how the text of the PNAB published in 2017 with the proposal to include managers in PHC in Brazil has been appropriated and carried out regionally.
<i>Nurse health center manager in primary care: the challenge of being polyvalent</i>	Matelski, et al., 2022	To analyze the practices associated with the nurse's performance as Unit Manager in Primary Health Care.
<i>Management in the Family Health Strategy: nurses' perceptions</i>	Mateus, et al., 2021	To investigate the nurses' view of management in the Family Health Strategy.
<i>Decision making in primary health care management: nurses perception</i>	Saraiva, et al., 2020	Analyze the decision-making process by nurse managers in Primary Health Care.
<i>Use of technologies by nurses</i>	Fernandes, et al., 2021	To analyze the management

<i>in the management of primary health care</i>		actions of nurses in Primary Health Care services from the perspective of technologies.
<i>Care management in family health strategies in nurses' perception</i>	Bica, et al., 2020	To know the perceptions and practices of nurses about care management.

Source: prepared by the author.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The management of health services represents a challenge for nursing professionals. Although workers develop actions so that management is effective and care is delivered to the population efficiently, following the changes made by managers represents a challenge for nurse managers. Thus, the present literature review brought together 10 studies with the objective of identifying the contributions of nursing in the management of care in Primary Health Care.

The study by Vendruscolo, Baldissera and Zocche (2025), whose objective was to map, reflect and predict solutions to the managerial weaknesses of work in PHC, from the perspective of co-management, brings data that show the interventions and solutions found. It is observed that the research participants perform efficient and problem-solving actions for users, however, it is not enough for the public health demand. Among the weaknesses found in the management of PHC, the lack of professionals is a crucial factor for care management. The excessive search for health services by users, classifying them as "hyperusers" is pointed out as another weakness for the service, with a failure in education, prevention and health promotion being pointed out. In addition, the participants of the research reported that the difficulties in incorporating various technologies, due to the absence or inability of those involved to operate them, implies the management of the services.

Gonçalves et al., 2024, brought in their research the evidence about the role of nursing management for the quality of care in Primary Care. Thus, the results demonstrate the potential of the nurses' performance as PHC managers, who are responsible for the administration, planning, structuring, development and analysis of service demands and actions. Still, it is evident that the valorization of these professionals in relation to management in PHC should be rethought, given the role they play. Regarding the weaknesses of the nurses' performance as managers of PHC units, it is observed that the

nurses' work overload is a limiting factor, since in addition to performing PHC actions and services, they are responsible for the organization, administration, supervision and coordination of the units.

Through a qualitative study, carried out in Chapecó (SC), Geremia et al., 2023, sought to analyze the organization of the work process of the coordinators of the Family Health Strategies (ESF). With regard to management in the FHS, the study showed that the turnover of professionals and the difficulty in creating bonds, the excessive number of users and insufficient infrastructure, the accumulation of care and managerial functions and the difficulty in managing the team are pointed out as the main weaknesses of the FHS management. When it comes to support in care and management practices, the factors that influence it are the difficulty of working with the lack of professionals in the interprofessional team and the practice of intersectoral actions to meet the demands of matrix support in the health unit. Furthermore, the study shows that the overload of professionals and managers who work in the FHT, when assuming the role of coordinator, for example, increases their responsibilities and needs to be prepared to manage a team, and it is desirable in the exercise of their duties that they meet the goals and indicators defined in the planning instruments of municipal management.

Pertili et al., 2022, sought to problematize how the text of the 2017 PNAB with the proposal to include PHC managers in Brazil has been appropriated and carried out regionally. The article reveals that the management of the Basic Health Units (UBS) in the Jequitinhonha Valley faces significant challenges to fully implement the PNAB guidelines. There is a distance between national policy and local reality, marked by structural limitations, scarcity of human resources and fragility in institutional support. Participatory management is also not very effective, with spaces such as councils and collegiate bodies often emptied. The role of UBS managers is ambiguous: many do not have specific training in management, accumulate care and administrative functions and, in some cases, are chosen by political criteria. Despite the difficulties, the professionals of the UBS develop local strategies to maintain the functioning of the services, adapting the regulations to the regional reality. The study concludes that it is essential to recognize local specificities and invest in the training and appreciation of managers to strengthen primary care in the region.

The study by Metelski et al., 2022, showed that most nurses who work as managers in Basic Health Units also provide care, accumulating functions that should, ideally, be separated. This overlap is considered a relevant challenge in the current National Primary

Care Policy (PNAB), since it compromises the clear definition of professional roles. The research revealed significant associations between the performance of nurse managers and the use of Telehealth, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and participation in Local Health Councils. It was also identified that chronic conditions are the main reason for users to seek services. Despite the importance of the nurse's role in management, the findings reinforce the need for greater professional appreciation, clear definition of managerial attributions and formal recognition of the complexity involved in the function, aiming to ensure the quality of health care and the sustainability of the care provided in Primary Care.

The research by Mateus et al., 2021, revealed that nurses play a central role in the management of Family Health Strategy (FHS) teams, although they face several challenges related to work structure, overload of functions, and professional recognition. The participants highlighted that management is exercised in a practical way, often without specific technical preparation, and it is necessary to learn in daily experience. The accumulation of managerial and care functions was pointed out as a factor of exhaustion, affecting both the quality of care and administrative performance. Despite the difficulties, nurses demonstrate commitment to the organization of the service, leading work processes and seeking strategies to deal with the scarcity of resources. The study also highlighted the lack of institutional support and continuing education, factors that hinder the strengthening of management in primary care. Thus, the results point to the urgency of valuing the role of nurses in management and investing in training and support for the qualified exercise of this function.

Saraiva, et al., 2020, show in their research that decision-making in the management of Primary Health Care (PHC) is a complex process, influenced by both individual and institutional factors. The nurses reported that many decisions are based on practical experience and knowledge accumulated throughout their professional practice, due to the lack of specific training in management. Decisions are often related to the organization of the work process, resource allocation, and conflict resolution in teams. A striking aspect was the perception of limited autonomy to decide, given the influence of municipal guidelines and precarious structural conditions. In addition, participants indicated difficulties in using formal decision-support instruments, such as health protocols and indicators. The study points to the need for continuing education and institutional support to qualify the managerial practice of nurses, strengthening their ability to make strategic decisions aligned with the needs of the population and the guidelines of the SUS.

The study by Fernandes et al., 2021 analyzed the use of technologies by nurses in the management of Primary Health Care (PHC) and identified that, although resources such as SISREG, the Electronic Medical Record of the Citizen (PEC) and Telehealth are present in the routine of these professionals, their use is still limited and poorly articulated with care management. Approximately 55% of the nurses reported using electronic systems to organize their work, and also participated in continuing education actions, such as online and face-to-face courses. However, technological practices are still punctual, and professionals face challenges such as overload of functions, lack of specific training in management, and scarce institutional support. These factors compromise the nurse's autonomy and hinder a more efficient and qualified management. The study concludes that it is necessary to expand access to technologies, promote management training and strengthen the strategic role of nursing in PHC to qualify the care provided to the population.

The research by Bica et al., 2020 revealed that, despite the recognized importance of PHC in the Unified Health System (SUS), nurses face significant challenges in their managerial performance. The overload of functions, the lack of specific training in management and the scarcity of human and material resources were pointed out as limitations for effective management. In addition, the lack of institutional support and the absence of clear public policies hinder the implementation of coordinated and problem-solving care practices. The nurses highlighted the need for professional appreciation, management training and greater autonomy to make decisions, aiming to improve the quality of care provided to the population. The study concludes that it is essential to strengthen the role of nurses in care management, ensuring adequate working conditions and institutional support, so that PHC effectively fulfills its role as coordinator of care in the SUS.

4 CONCLUSION

The role of nursing in the management of care in Primary Health Care (PHC) is fundamental for the efficient functioning of the Unified Health System (SUS). Nurses, by accumulating care and managerial functions, become central agents in the organization of services, in the coordination of teams and in the articulation of actions aimed at health promotion, prevention and recovery. The studies analyzed show that, despite the numerous contributions of these professionals, challenges persist such as work overload, lack of specific technical preparation in management, scarcity of human and structural resources, and limited institutional support.

In view of this, it is essential that there be investments in continuing education in management, professional valorization and a clear definition of the nurse's attributions in the context of PHC. Recognizing and strengthening the strategic role of nursing in the management of health services is essential to ensure a more resolute, equitable, and humanized primary care, contributing significantly to the consolidation of the principles and guidelines of the SUS.

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