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Francisca Valda: professional trajectory and legacy for Brazilian nursing

Francisca Valda: trajetória profissional e legado para a enfermagem brasileira

Francisca Valda: trayectoria profesional y legado para la enfermería brasileña

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ABSTRACT

Objective: analyze aspects of nurse Francisca Valda's professional trajectory, highlighting her contributions and the impact of her legacy on the political, educational and professional development of nursing in Brazil. **Methods:** this is a biographical study that used as main sources the master's dissertation entitled "A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em enfermagem" and the book "Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem", which present autobiographical fragments of her life and education, constructed through an in-depth individual interview. **Results:** the biographical aspects were systematized into five topics: biographical summary; trajectory in nursing; political activism; redemocratization of Brazil and the participation movement; and activity in the Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem. **Final considerations:** Francisca Valda's biographical fragments show a trajectory of ruptures, discoveries and resistance, with repercussions in the health field and in the foundation and organization of nursing as a social practice. Her political-scientific activity brought a notable legacy to Brazilian nursing and social control in the Sistema Único de Saúde. **Descriptors:** Biography; Nursing; History of Nursing; Education, Nursing; Politics.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar aspectos da trajetória profissional da enfermeira Francisca Valda, evidenciando suas contribuições e o impacto de seu legado para o desenvolvimento político, educacional e profissional da enfermagem no Brasil. **Métodos:** trata-se de estudo biográfico que utilizou como fontes principais a dissertação de mestrado denominada "A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em Enfermagem" e o livro "Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem", os quais apresentam fragmentos autobiográficos de vida e formação, construídos através de entrevista individual em profundidade. **Resultados:** os aspectos biográficos foram sistematizados em cinco temas: síntese biográfica; trajetória na enfermagem; militância política; redemocratização do Brasil e o movimento participação; e atuação na Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem. **Considerações finais:** os fragmentos biográficos de Francisca Valda evidenciam uma trajetória de rupturas, descobertas e resistências, com repercussões no campo da saúde e na fundamentação e organização da enfermagem como prática social. Sua atuação político-científica trouxe um legado notável para a enfermagem brasileira e o controle social no Sistema Único de Saúde.

Descritores: Biografia; Enfermagem; História da Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Política.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar aspectos de la trayectoria profesional de la enfermera Francisca Valda, destacando sus contribuciones y el impacto de su legado en el desarrollo político, educativo y profesional de la enfermería en Brasil. **Método:** se trata de un estudio biográfico que utilizó como fuentes principales la tesis de maestría titulada *A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em enfermagem* y el libro *Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem*, que presentan fragmentos autobiográficos de vida y formación, construidos a través de entrevistas individuales en profundidad. **Resultados:** los aspectos biográficos fueron sistematizados en cinco temas: síntesis biográfica; trayectoria en enfermería; activismo político; redemocratización de Brasil y el movimiento de participación; y trabajar en la Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem. **Consideraciones finales:** los fragmentos biográficos de Francisca Valda revelan una trayectoria de rupturas, descubrimientos y resistencias, con repercusiones en el campo de la salud y en la fundación y organización de la enfermería como práctica social. Su trabajo político-científico dejó un legado notable a la enfermería brasileña y al control social en el Sistema Único de Saúde. **Descriptores:** Biografía; Enfermería; Historia de la Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Política.

INTRODUCTION

Biography emerges as an important tool to facilitate historical discussion, arousing readers' interest by connecting names and faces to historical processes. In this regard, its objective is not to return to the old history based on traditional characteristics, such as that centered on great men, but rather to contribute to a broader understanding of history, involving the social and cultural environment⁽¹⁾.

Therefore, the construction of biographical studies is not restricted to great figures linked to relevant historical landmarks, but also encompasses individuals who, directly or indirectly, impacted or continued to influence the social, cultural and political context of the current era. In the context of nursing, nurses' biographies and life trajectories have been important in nursing education, as they have contributed to the development of nursing, guidance in the creation of schools and associations as well as promotion of theories and analyses on social and political advances in the area^(2,3).

This study is justified by the need to know, understand and value the preservation of Francisca Valda's memory, trajectory and life story, a nurse from Rio Grande do Norte who plays a crucial role in the activism of social, educational and professional movements in Brazilian health and nursing.

OBJECTIVE

Analyze aspects of nurse Francisca Valda's professional trajectory, highlighting her contributions and the impact of her legacy on the educational and professional development of nursing in Brazil.

METHODS

This is a biographical study about Francisca Valda, a retired nurse and teacher from the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte* (UFRN), whose career trajectory was marked by a tireless search for contributions to the technical, scientific and humanistic development of Brazilian nursing. In addition to her professional commitment, Valda stood out in the fight for labor rights, defending the appreciation and recognition of nursing professionals in various spheres. Her legacy reflects a deep dedication to nursing and well-being of workers in the field, consolidating her as a fundamental reference in the history of nursing in Brazil.

For this purpose, the master's dissertation called "*A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em enfermagem*"⁽⁴⁾ and the book "*Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem*" were used⁽⁵⁾, which present Francisca Valda's autobiographical fragments, constructed from an in-depth individual interview. Moreover, the *cordel* "*Francisca Valda da Silva, Oxente, que enfermeiro Competente*"⁽⁶⁾, written by poet Onã Silva, was used.

RESULTS

Biographical summary

*"Era outubro, belo dia,
O Ceará em alvorada
Veio à luz uma lindeza
Pra sua família amada
Nasceu a nossa guerreira
Sim, foi Francisca Valda"*⁽⁶⁾

Francisca Valda was born in Fortaleza in 1951, the eldest of seven children of Valter Inácio da Silva and Maria Helena Moreira e Silva. As a child, she moved to Rio de Janeiro and then to Belém, where she lived for 13 years. In Belém, your family lived in the Arsenal da Marinha neighborhood, which lacked infrastructure, which had a profound influence on Valda, awakening in her a sense of nonconformity with poverty and oppression. Her choice to become a nurse was marked by difficult childhood experiences, such as the death of her brother Moisés and her father's hospitalization. From a young age, she became involved in an Evangelical church, where she learned about generosity and solidarity, despite her father's disapproval. At school, she had positive experiences with a private professor, but she also received an authoritarian education from another professor, which affected her self-esteem^(4,5).

In 1959, the family moved to Vila Militar, where Valda studied at *Colégio Almirante Renato Guilhobel*, excelling in her studies. She was then accepted into *Colégio Herbart*, in Belém, which represented a social ascension. Her parents adopted a sister, and Valda later had three more brothers. In 1964, with the military coup, her father was drafted, and the family moved to Fortaleza, where Valda enrolled at *Colégio Estadual Liceu do Ceará*, consolidating her education. These experiences helped Valda develop a critical vision and the ability to make informed choices^(4,5).

Trajectory in nursing

Francisca Valda dreamed of being an evangelist or a missionary, but life led her to the health field. Influenced by her family, she tried to enter the medical school entrance exam, but after being considered overqualified, she decided to study nursing at the *Escola de Enfermagem São Vicente de Paulo*. Initially torn between joy and frustration, she abandoned medicine to dedicate herself to nursing, which was not well received by everyone. Concerned about not burdening her family financially, she obtained a scholarship and, in her first year, was

selected for a paid internship at the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Fortaleza*. These practical experiences were essential in her education^(4,5).

She completed her nursing course in 1973 and, shortly after, was hired as a nurse at *Santa Casa* and, later, as a professor. Concerned about the fragmentation of the nursing team and the lack of qualifications among professionals, she committed herself to the fight for the professionalization and reassessment of nursing^(4,5).

In 1974, she passed a national public exam for one of the leading hospitals in Ceará and, in the same year, she got married. In 1976, she passed the selection process to become a collaborating professor at UFRN, in the subject of introduction to nursing, during a period in which the military regime allowed the hiring of temporary professors. She already held permanent positions at the *Universidade do Estado do Ceará* and at *Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Fortaleza*, but she decided to leave behind the stability in Fortaleza and accept the challenge of moving to Natal, seeking self-knowledge and new opportunities. This move, which involved giving up certainties and stability, was a difficult decision. Soon after, she passed the public exam at UFRN, beating out the competition with candidates from outside^(4,5).

Political activism

Francisca Valda moved to Natal in search of autonomy and to break away from emotional and social limitations. Facing a predominantly male reality, her decision did not mean breaking away from her family, but rather seeking her own path. Just 15 days after moving, she suffered a car accident, resulting in head trauma, but survived. During her hospitalization, she was invited by Dr. Maria Graziela Teixeira Barroso to join the new nursing course at the *Universidade Federal do Ceará*, although she preferred to remain at UFRN^(4,5).

"Natal won me over because I had room to breathe. I began to be politically active in the PMDB-led front, which completely diverged from my family, which was enlisted by the ARENA political camp"⁽⁴⁾.

Francisca Valda played a crucial role in the newly created nursing program at UFRN, where she worked with professors such as Abigail Moura, Maria Celsa Franco e Raimunda Germano, contributing to the integration of theory and practice. During this period, she became actively involved in politics, joining the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party and helping to create the UFRN Professors' Association and the Nurses' Association, in addition to being part of the first board of the Pre-Union Nurses' Association of Rio Grande do Norte⁽⁴⁾.

She always sought to align technical training with social awareness, not allowing herself to be carried away by the neutrality of knowledge. She defended the importance of contextualizing values and integrating technical knowledge with citizenship and social commitment. Valda also got involved in the health movement that supported collective health, and completed a master's degree in social sciences at UFRN, with the dissertation "*Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem: mudanças e continuidades – a propósito do Movimento Participação (1979/1989)*". Choosing a master's degree in an area other than nursing was criticized by many, but she considered it fundamental to understanding the articulation between technical and political competence^(4,5).

Valda is a national reference in nursing education and participatory management in the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS, Brazilian Health System). Already retired from UFRN, she continued to be involved in projects such as the "Project for Training Nursing Professionals for Participatory Management and Social Control", and continues to defend the public SUS with active participation in the Brazilian National Health Council. Francisca Valda also ran for state deputy in 2010, defending "quality public health and education", but was not elected. The experience, however, brought valuable lessons and contributed to her political and personal growth^(4,5).

Redemocratization of Brazil and participation movement

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Valda and her colleagues realized that healthcare professionals, especially nurses, were not prepared to deal with chronic problems and new social demands. In search of new knowledge, they associated themselves with thinkers who influenced the formation of a new paradigm in health, which she considered a broad and profound reform. Nursing played a fundamental role in this transformation, especially in the organization of work and in the implementation of the Health Reform in Brazil^(4,5).

This reform, based on the right to health, encountered resistance from established interests, but Valda and her colleagues engaged in several fronts, such as Community Health Week, the Brazilian Center for Health Studies and the creation of the Brazilian Association of Public Health, in addition to being active in unions and councils. Nursing played a significant role in the 8th Brazilian National Health Conference, which established the SUS foundations, and in the 1988 Constituent Assembly, which legalized the SUS. Despite being a small group, it played a crucial role in defeating the House Bill by Representative Salvador Juliano, which attempted to control healthcare professions^(4,5).

In the 1980s, the “participation movement” emerged as a force for change within nursing, promoting political awareness and mobilization of the category. In 1984, they elected the Participation Alliance in the *Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem* (ABEn, Brazilian Nursing Association), but faced electoral fraud that invalidated the victory. However, they created a provisional national board of directors which, with the help of ABEn/RN, led by Dr. Abigail Moura, recommended the suspension of financial contributions to ABEn *Nacional*, which led to a negotiation that resulted in the change of ABEn’s statute. Following this change, the majority elected Participation Alliance in 1986^(4,5).

Valda’s activism in ABEn, especially in the 1980s, was an important space for political formation, contributing to the collective awareness of nursing and to participation in the Health Reform. During this period, she also led ABEn/RN, while caring for her third son, who accompanied her to meetings and events⁽⁴⁾.

Work at Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem

*“Ela é tão competente!
Já foi muito premiada:
Na Aben e Enfermagem
Na Academia, honrada,
Com Medalhas, e Comendas
Muito Homenageada”⁽⁶⁾*

Valda began her career in nursing when she joined ABEn/CE while still a student, and was one of the first to register with the Regional Nursing Council of Ceará. She served on several ABEn boards, becoming president of the RN section between 1986 and 1989. In 2001, she took over ABEn’s national presidency, a position she held until 2007, marking her career with great achievements in the area. During her term, she participated in the formulation and implementation of important initiatives, such as the Brazilian National Nursing Workers Training Program, which aimed to qualify health workers, especially nursing technicians^(4,5).

Valda was also a key figure in the creation of the Brazilian National Agenda for Sustainability and in strengthening health education, standing out in the implementation of the 2001 Brazilian National Curricular Guidelines and the 2004 Brazilian National Forum for Education of Healthcare professions, promoting integration between the various professions in the health area. She was also in charge of *Uni-Natal*, an innovative project that integrated teaching, care and community, promoting changes in the care model and in the training of health students^(4,5).

At ABEn *Nacional*, Valda also contributed to the creation of public policies and assessment systems for undergraduate health courses, including the Multidisciplinary Residency Certification System. She also participated in several initiatives to improve health education, such as the creation of the Undergraduate Health Course Assessment System^(4,5).

Currently, Valda is a reference in the defense of the rights of nursing workers and the appreciation of health education. In 2022, she participated in mobilizations at the national congress for implementing the nursing salary floor. She is also a member of the Brazilian National Health Council, coordinating the Intersectoral Commission on Human Resources and Labor Relations, focusing on the Brazilian National Policy for Continuing Education in Health. Her career is marked by a constant fight for healthcare professionals’ dignity and appreciation⁽⁷⁾.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The history of nursing needs to be rescued and valued through the legacy of professionals who inspired generations. In this sense, nurse Francisca Valda’s contributions to Brazilian nursing represent a significant

milestone in this process, as her trajectory is an example of dedication to teaching and practicing nursing, embodied in her performance with technical competence and ethical and political commitment to health and nursing workers.

Therefore, Francisca Valda's professional trajectory presents essential elements for the defense of the right to health and of the working class in the health field. This perspective promotes the critical, reflective and humanistic understanding necessary for the organization and implementation of the health work process, as well as nursing as a social practice, overcoming the logic of the biomedical model that reproduces social inequities.

*"Mas que linda a história!
De Valda, a enfermeira,
De vera é competente
Cuidar é sua bandeira,
Meu cordel tem gratidão
Pra essa mulher guerreira"⁽⁶⁾*

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