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Challenges for writing the History of Contemporary Nursing

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Investigation of the Nursing past is a recent activity among nurses. However, in this short period, those who have dedicated themselves to getting to know our history have already produced good results in publications and presentations at events, seminars, colloquiums, etc.

The importance of this scientific production urges us to carry out a historiographical review not only to analyze what we are doing, to have a global vision, but also to know which historiographic currents are underpinning our ongoing research studies and future perspectives.

The reflection that we dare to make is based on a conceptual view in the History of Nursing, where we start from the fact that knowledge about Nursing contributes to understanding the context of this profession as well as to the construction of its memory and identity; and one of the ways to achieve these results is the production of knowledge through research into its history.

Our understanding is that historical research qualifies nurses for a critical and reflective understanding of their profession, enabling them to unveil the transformations of the profession, allowing them to understand the movement of construction and deconstruction of the past, in the perspective of the recovery and preservation of collective memory ⁽¹⁾.

Another possibility is that historical Nursing research works to preserve historical sources (documents, images, records, etc.). In order to develop a writing of history in the search for scientific evidence, it needs to be reported and written; and historical work is a matter of perspective and vision, seeing and saying, writing what happened and presenting it as it was seen like a mirror, and it is there that some of the problems that have been constituting the historian's routine up to the present day are found.

The numerous reformulations in modern historiography do not need to work between the boundaries of the visible and the invisible, in order to obtain a real view of things, from an analytical, broader and deeper perspective.

At the end of the 20th century there was certain questioning of the evidence. "Which role does the historian play from now on?" ⁽²⁾.

For this author, the historian's work must take into account the way of writing history, the importance of time, the type of writing that is imposed on the documents and what should prevail (document, writing, writer).

In this sense, the historian's evidence is that which seeks "the why", "how is it that happens" the view of the fact and the evidence - how to think the fact and the source. The evidence has to do with the fact that the historian's narrative will never be complete ⁽²⁾.

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The historian must promote the view of events as an instrument to apprehend the historical event or fact in depth, since history is philosophical and is a process which demands that the historian must have theoretical and epistemological clarity to produce complete historical knowledge.

The main challenges for writing history today is the requirement for an integrative (non-selective) view of the History of Nursing to contribute to and recognize the identity of nurses as professionals who propose to provide an essential service to humanity; the understanding that Nursing is an ontological profession that is concerned with the origins of the human being and its evolution, that the knowledge about the History of Nursing fulfills an essential function for the professionals themselves, in identifying their socialization process as a group; and the creation of collective memory and historical studies help to understand the central concepts that shape the Nursing discipline as well as its ways of thinking that make it evolve as a science.

At this historical moment, what we still see in the practice is that there is a reduced number of national and international Nursing Journals that publish articles resulting from historical research (long periods to be published) and that there is a need to strengthen the research line of the History of Nursing, as well as appropriation of historical research methodologies and theoretical-philosophical frameworks.

On the other hand, it is urgent to strengthen the Research groups about the History of Nursing and fight for better investments and funding for research and maintenance of journals by official funding agencies or private organizations.

An important perspective is to develop historical research studies anchored in the New History Paradigm – the Problematization of History – possibilities to expand the historical sources and valid and reliable methodological strategies, continuing to revisit the History of Nursing as a health profession.

We believe that the historicity of Nursing needs to be revisited in its object/social/economic and political representations, increasingly developing the instigating and restless look of a historian in the reading of historical content materials when recovering or revisiting the view of the past in all its dimensions, taking a critical look at the past and its speeches.

Therefore, Nursing is strengthened by bringing its entire historicity to light, imprinting new dimensions of knowledge and practices with a diversity of views of the world and science, contributing to the consolidation of historical and fundamental research methodologies for critical construction and historiographical inference, making the writing of significant history for Nursing and Health, pointing out ruptures, transformations and struggles/resistance, knowledge and powers and bring light to care and its practices, as well as giving theoretical and epistemological visibility to historical evidence, qualifying scientific research for publication.

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