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Understanding of the concept of nursing care – inductive analysis

The question of what nursing is and what it is not was first posed by F. Nightingale, who described her considerations and experiences in “Notes on Nursing – what it is and what it is not” published in 1859. Nightingale was also the first to define the concept of nursing care as providing assistance to a patient to live a better life (1, 2).

The definition of nursing care formulated by V. Henderson, accepted and adopted by the International Council of Nurses, is the best known and most frequently quoted, and of the highest renown in Polish nursing (3). According to Henderson’s approach: ‘Nursing is primarily helping people (sick or healthy) in the performance of those activities contributing to health, or its recovery (or to a peaceful death) that they would perform unaided if they had the necessary strength, will, or knowledge. It is likewise the unique contribution of nursing care to help people to be independent of such assistance as soon as possible...’ (4, 5).

In the relevant Polish literature, there are many other valuable definitions of nursing care conditioned by many factors, e.g. of a distinct historical-cultural distinct character, social expectations, and the functioning system of health care.

Theoretical framework. The goal of analyzing of the above-mentioned definitions, in consistence with the understanding of the term ‘defining’ according to Pawłowski’s theory, is to establish the sense and scope of nursing care, determine the meaning of the word and explicate its contents. While performing an analysis of the understanding of the term ‘nursing care’ by the inductive method (6), its common traits may be found, which specifically differentiate the selected group of indicators of the definition of nursing care from the cases of using other expressions. These are three categories of indicators, which for scientific purposes may be called definitional traits/indicators containing the following (6) • the scope of actions, activities realized within nursing care • characteristics of nursing subjects • nursing goal with the reservation that for some authors of definitions this goal becomes so obvious that it is often omitted, considered as the foremost in contemporary nursing practice in Poland, as well as guidelines valid in the defining area.

The aim of the studies was empirical verification of definitional traits of the concept of nursing based on their identification by a group of Polish nurses’ practitioners.

Ethical considerations. The Commission for Bioethics at the Medical University in Lublin, after getting acquainted with the study protocol, information for the nurses and patient nurses form expressed a positive opinion concerning the concept of the studies. During the realization of the studies, the principles of ethics were obeyed consistent with the Helsinki Declaration.

Design. The study was conducted in two phases. The first, pre-scientific phase, was of a qualitative character, whereas the second, scientific phase, was of a quantitative character.

The qualitative analyses. The objective of the qualitative studies was a more precise determination of the indicators used by nurses while defining nursing care, which would then constitute the object for quantitative analyses at the second stage of the study. The study was carried out in 2005–2006. The studies covered documents reflecting opinions of 300 occupationally active State Registered Nurses. The analysis was performed of the documents in the form of an essay: 'Nursing is a profession, the essence of which is nursing care', thus providing an answer to the question 'what is nursing care?' (7). After a preliminary analysis of the content of the collected essays, it was found that there were no significant differences between the respondents, therefore 27 essays were selected for detailed analysis by stratified sampling from each yearly students' list. The described character of the task allowed the collection of valuable material, which reflected the understanding of the essence of nursing care in the group examined. The qualitative analysis of the material enabled to distinguish in records the common traits used by the respondents. The elements were as follows:

1. Character of nursing considering • the type and scope of nursing services provided in Poland, including professional care covering health promoting, prophylactic, educational-didactic, care-support, therapeutic and rehabilitation actions • approach to the subject of care: individualised, holistic (covering biological, mental and social aspects) • traits of nursing care activities: independent, based on co-operation within a therapeutic team (interdisciplinary), mutually dependent, dependent.

2. Recipients of nursing services, considering the division according to the criterion of the state of a patient, place of providing nursing care and patient's age, limiting categorisation to a healthy or ill person as a recipient of care.

3. In addition, in the complete content of the definition, the respondents relatively often considered the process of nursing, primary nursing and nursing theory.

The analysis of the essays written by nurses indicated that each of the respondents, on average, applied at least three indicators (scope from 2–10). The respondents most frequently resolved their descriptions concerning nursing to defining a healthy or ill person as recipients of nursing care services (23 essays) and an exclusively ill person (four essays). Nearly a half of the nurses, after developing the keynote of the essay, indicated educational-didactic activities in nursing care, aiming at the preparation of a patient to self-care, while 20 respondents mentioned care-support activities as important components of nursing. The analysis of the research material collected indicated that every third respondent, while describing the essence of nursing care, also considered the features of the nursing process, such as individuality, continuity and totality.

The quantitative analyses. The main studies were conducted by the method of a diagnostic survey with the use of the author's technique of a questionnaire form, among occupationally active nurses, in three hospitals located in a large city in central-eastern Poland. The presented results of the study are a part of empirical analysis concerning the understanding of nursing care and the implications for professional occupational practice. For the purposes of the presented study, the results obtained in a group will be presented based on the following tasks • explanation of the understanding of the concept of nursing care in a descriptive form • determination of the intensity of definitional traits of the concept of nursing care selected based on the first phase of the study, on a linear scale from 0–10, where 0 = none, and 10 = total • identification of the subject of nursing.

As a result of inductive analysis of the definition of nursing care, among the selected definitional traits, comparability of understanding the traits concerning the characteristics of care subjects was recognized, as well as the nursing goal, especially considering the modern definition of the concept. However, a variety was observed with respect to the scope of actions or activities realised within nursing. Therefore, seven activities were selected, most often mentioned in the relevant literature and most frequently identified by nurses at the first phase of the study, which constituted definitional traits, i.e. accompanying, assisting, communicating, helping, managing, providing care and supporting ones.

PARTICIPANTS

The study covered a group of 324 occupationally active nurses, the majority of whom were females – 314 (96.91%), while the remaining 10 respondents (3.08%) were males. Female and male nurses were aged 22–57. In the study group, the greatest number of nurses had a period of employment within the range of 10–15 years – 72 (22.22%); 15–20 years – 66 respondents (20.38%), and over 20–70 (21.60%). The majority of the respondents completed Medical High School – 140 (43.21%), Medical Vocational School – 129 (39.82%), and 41 nurses (12.65%) possessed a university MA degree in nursing. The respondents were employed mainly at the workplace of a section nurse – 305 (94.16%), and only 15 (4.63%) as charge nurses.

RESULTS

The results of the study will be presented according to the definitional traits distinguished for the research goals. The scope of a definitional trait concerning ascribing actions/activities, the satisfaction of which defines and identifies nursing care, in an open question directed to the respondents, covered the following expressions used by nurses in the study in order to reflect the essence of the understanding of nursing: the expression ‘helping’ was mentioned by 108 respondents (33.33%); the expression ‘providing care’ was mentioned by 45 respondents (13.89%); the expression ‘supporting’ was mentioned by 45 respondents (13.89%); the expression ‘assisting’ was mentioned by 15 respondents (4.63%); the expression ‘accompanying’ was mentioned by 10 respondents (4.32%); the expression ‘communicating’ was mentioned by 10 respondents (3.33%); the expression ‘managing’ was applied by 61 respondents (0.31%).

In order to express the essence of nursing care, the nurses also examined the applied expressions describing individual activities performed on behalf of the nursing subject. The expressions were as follows: patient’s education – 30 respondents (9.26%); helping with self-care activities – 22 respondents (6.79%); performing hygienic activities – 19 respondents (5.86%); providing support for a patient – 4 respondents (1.24%); increasing patient’s efficiency, participation in diagnostic tests, performing measurements on a patient – two respondents each (0.93% each category).

A very frequent way of defining the concept of nursing care was the application of inscriptions reflecting the essence of preferred or known theory of nursing. These were the following expressions: satisfaction of bio-psycho-social needs of a patient – 152 respondents (46.92%); facilitation of adapting and coping in health and illness – 10 respondents (3.09%); organizing external conditions of patient’s habitation – 6 respondents (1.86%); reducing stress-inducing factors and decreasing their effects – 1 respondent (0.31%).

The description of the understanding of the concept of nursing care in the group of the nurses in the survey also contained the second distinguished definitional trait, i.e. a group of nursing subjects with respect to whom nursing activities are undertaken. In their descriptions the respondents mentioned: a healthy person – 193 respondents (59.57%); an ill person – 30 respondents (9.26%); patient’s family – 7 respondents (2.16%); a person threatened by disease – 1 respondent (0.31%); a person threatened by disease – 60 respondents (18.51%).

In the subsequent phase of the study, the degree of intensity of seven activities was analysed (on a linear scale of the value of 0–10 cm) – distinguished in definitions of nursing to express its essence and most frequently occur in the relevant literature. Table 1 presents detailed results.

An analysis of the results obtained indicates that in the group of respondents the following variables most comprehensively characterize the essence of nursing: providing care, supporting

and helping, followed by assisting, accompanying and managing. Mean values of all the variables exceeded the value of 6 cm on the scale, and the variable 'provision of care', which was scored the highest, exceeded the value of 8 cm on the scale. Therefore, it may be presumed that with such an evaluation of the intensity of individual variables there are expressions strongly identified in the group with the understanding of the concept of nursing care. The variables: providing care, communicating, supporting and helping also reach the upper quartile of the scale, i.e. 10 cm.

Table 1. Numerical values of variables describing the concept of nursing

Variable	Number	Mean	Median	Lower quartile	Upper quartile	Standard deviation
Providing care	321	8.54	9.20	7.7	10.0	1.79
Communicating	320	7.96	8.50	6.8	10.0	2.23
Supporting	320	7.84	8.35	6.7	10.0	2.18
Helping	322	7.58	8.00	5.8	10.0	2.33
Assisting	321	6.52	7.00	4.7	8.9	2.62
Accompanying	319	6.42	6.60	4.7	8.8	2.68
Managing	315	6.19	6.30	4.7	8.5	2.74

CONCLUSIONS

The comparison of the scopes of understanding of the usability and cognitive value of the concept of nursing care in the group of nurses in the survey, allowed the following observations • there is a common core of understanding of the concept created • there exists a full identification of human states (in health, threat of disease and in illness) as a subject of nursing understood as a cognitive value of the concept analyzed, with identification of only the state of illness as a basic determinant for undertaking nursing activities – a practical value • in addition nursing, in the complete content of the definition, the respondents relatively often considered as the process of nursing.

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SUMMARY

Polish nursing remains in a period of scientific research in the area of making significant concepts more precise. Defining nursing is subject to changes conditioned by many developmental factors specific for, among other things, nation, culture, a system of care and social expectations. Scientific defining of concepts should be based on empirical verification, which allows combining theory and practice. A controlled explication method was applied with the use of the authors' technique of a questionnaire form. The analysis of results was based on the model of inductive analysis of concepts according to Pawłowski. The study was carried out in two phases. The first phase was a qualitative study. The object of this study was the analysis of traits used by nurses (in a group of 300 respondents) in defining nursing. The second phase was a quantitative study, conducted among 324 nurses practitioners. Analysis of the results obtained shows that in the group of nurses in the survey the essence of nursing (ordered according to the strength of their identification) is characterised by the following variables: providing care, communicating, helping, assisting, accompanying and managing. The subjects of nursing care indicated by the nurses examined were the states of a healthy person, an ill person and the one threatened by disease.

Rozumienie pojęcia pielęgnowanie – analiza indukcyjna

Pielęgniarstwo polskie pozostaje w fazie poszukiwań badawczych w zakresie uściśleń terminologicznych dotyczących najważniejszych pojęć. Definiowanie pielęgnowania ulega zmianom warunkowanym wieloma czynnikami rozwojowymi, swoistymi między innymi dla kultury, systemu opieki zdrowotnej i oczekiwań społecznych. Naukowe definiowanie pojęć należy opierać na weryfikacji empirycznej, która pozwala na łączenie teorii z praktyką. W badaniach zastosowano metodę wyjaśniania kontrolowanego z wykorzystaniem autorskiej techniki kwestionariusza ankiety. Analizę wyników oparto na modelu analizy indukcyjnej pojęć według Pawłowskiego. Badania przeprowadzono w dwóch etapach. Pierwszy miał charakter badań jakościowych. Celem ich była analiza wskaźników wykorzystywanych przez pielęgniarki (w grupie 300 osób). Drugi etap miał charakter badań ilościowych, prowadzonych w grupie 324 pielęgniarek praktyków. Analiza uzyskanych wyników badań wskazuje na to, że w grupie badanych istotę pielęgnowania charakteryzują zmienne: opiekowanie, porozumiewanie, pomaganie, asystowanie, towarzyszenie i prowadzenie. Podmiotami opieki wskazywanymi przez badane pielęgniarki były stany człowieka zdrowego, chorego i zagrożonego chorobą.