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COMPAIXÃO – UM IMPERATIVO PARA A FORMAÇÃO E A PRÁTICA DE ENFERMAGEM
COMPASSION – AN IMPERATIVE FOR NURSING EDUCATION AND PRACTICE
COMPASIÓN – UN IMPERATIVO PARA LA EDUCACIÓN Y LA PRÁCTICA DE ENFERMERÍA

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EDITORIAL

COMPASSION – AN IMPERATIVE FOR NURSING EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

Historically grounded in ethical, religious, and philosophical values, compassion is understood as a sensitive response to the suffering of others, accompanied by a genuine intention to alleviate it. Florence Nightingale, a founding reference of modern nursing, already considered it an indispensable attribute, capable of giving meaning to care and dignity to the patient (Straughair, 2012).

The concept has been reviewed in recent decades considering the emerging challenges of providing care in increasingly complex and demanding contexts. The Francis Report (2013) publication marked a turning point, essentially in the UK, by highlighting the risks of devaluing compassionate care in healthcare organisations. Since then, the promotion of compassion has become an ethical aspiration and a requirement for the quality and safety of the healthcare provided.

Compassion in nursing is often associated and related to empathy and care, involving the perception of suffering, the ability to connect with the cared-for person, and the commitment to their dignity (Gilbert et al., 2017; Von Dietze & Orb, 2000). For the National Health Service, this competence manifests itself in the provision of care based on respect and sensitivity, which are fundamental to building effective therapeutic relationships (Papadopoulos & Ali, 2016). Some researchers suggest that compassionate practice contributes to improving clinical outcomes, increasing user satisfaction and the well-being of healthcare professionals (Percy & Richardson, 2018).

High-demand contexts marked by work overload, a shortage of human resources, and emotional exhaustion make it difficult to express compassion in everyday clinical life (Durkin et al., 2018). However, some of the existing assessment instruments, such as the Compassion Competence Scale, the Sinclair Compassion Questionnaire, the Compassion Scale or the Compassionate Engagement and Action Scales, have contributed to a greater understanding of the phenomenon, but face methodological limitations related to their subjectivity and limited cross-cultural applicability (Gilbert et al., 2017; Nunes, 2015; Papadopoulos & Ali, 2016; Pommier, 2010).

Regarding nursing education, the inclusion of compassion in curricula has been late and sometimes forgotten. Some researchers advocate the need for pedagogical approaches that enable the development of emotional and relational skills, using methodologies such as clinical simulation, critical reflection, the use of narratives, and experiential learning (Adam & Taylor, 2014; Hofmeyer et al., 2017). These strategies are effective in promoting active listening, self-awareness, and empathy, which are fundamental values for building an ethical and humanised practice.

Supervised clinical practice is essential in reinforcing compassion, especially when students are accompanied by nurses who model compassionate attitudes and promote contexts of mutual support and respect (Condeço, 2023). When combined with reflective practice and a healthy clinical environment, formal training contributes significantly to the internalisation of compassionate behaviours. Digital and hybrid learning, using online modules and virtual environments, has also shown potential in promoting this competence, especially in international and multicultural educational contexts (Raustøl & Tveit, 2023).

In Portugal, scientific production on compassionate care in nursing is still incipient. Studies such as that by Nunes (2015) identify three essential attributes of compassion (feeling, establishing a helping relationship, and acting in favour of the other), highlighting the importance of integrating it into the training pathway from the first years of the nursing course. However, preliminary studies indicate that many nursing students do not receive structured training on compassion, which reinforces the urgency of its inclusion in study plans (Condeço, 2023).

In this context, it is essential that researchers, teachers, professionals, and political decision-makers make concerted efforts to promote a culture of compassion in training and clinical practice. This implies valuing this concept in guiding documents, curriculum management, and creating organisational environments that support practices based on holistic care, human dignity, and the promotion of professional well-being.

Therefore, compassion's challenge in nursing is transversal: it requires critical reflection, ethical commitment, and transformative action. Training compassionate professionals is an ongoing and intentional task that doesn't start in the classroom, but must be developed and monitored there, consolidated in supervised practice, and rooted in institutional and organizational policies that value care. When health systems face increasing pressure, compassion should not be seen as a moral adornment but as a structuring element of excellence in care and the integrity of the profession.

Keywords: compassion; empathy; nursing care; nursing education

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