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RESEARCH ARTICLE (ORIGINAL)



Advocacy and working conditions at the university: A strategy for the empowerment of nursing teachers

Advocacy e condições de trabalho na universidade: Estratégia para o empoderamento do docente de enfermagem Advocacy y condiciones laborales en la universidad: Estrategia para el empoderamiento del profesorado de enfermería

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Abstract

Background: In nursing, advocacy seeks to contribute to the right to health, which is intrinsically related to the human right to a healthy life.

Objective: To analyze university teachers' perceptions of advocacy in nursing and discuss strategies to promote advocacy for university nursing teachers.

Methodology: A descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach was carried out in two public universities in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The participants were 14 nursing teachers. A focus group was conducted, and data were analyzed using the content analysis technique.

Results: Advocacy stands out as a crucial activity to defend the professional category's interests, using the media as a strategy for disseminating nursing work, including nursing teachers.

Conclusion: An investment in advocacy is needed as it is a strategy for valuing university nursing teachers and promoting their professional development.

Keywords: health advocacy; work conditions; nursing professor; nursing

Resumo

Enquadramento: No campo da enfermagem a *advocacy* procura contribuir no direito à saúde, que se insere no campo dos direitos humanos, pois está intrinsecamente relacionado ao direito de todos a uma vida saudável.

Objetivo: Analisar a perceção de docentes sobre a *advocacy* na enfermagem e discutir as estratégias de promoção de *advocacy* para o trabalhador docente universitário de enfermagem.

Metodologia: Estudo descritivo e exploratório de abordagem qualitativa realizado em duas universidades públicas situadas no município do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. Os participantes foram 14 docentes de enfermagem. Utilizou-se o grupo focal e os dados foram analisados à luz da técnica de análise de conteúdo.

Resultados: Destaca-se a *advocacy* como atividade imperativa para alcançar a defesa dos interesses da categoria profissional, bem como a utilização das mídias como estratégia de divulgação do trabalho da enfermagem, incluindo os docentes de enfermagem.

Conclusão: A *advocacy* é uma estratégia de promoção e valorização dos docentes de enfermagem em universidades sendo necessário o investimento nessa estratégia como importante recurso para a promoção da valorização profissional.

Palavras-chave: advocacia em saúde; condições de trabalho; docente de enfermagem, enfermagem

Resumen

Marco contextual: En el ámbito de la enfermería, la *advocacy* pretende contribuir al derecho a la salud, que se enmarca en el ámbito de los derechos humanos, ya que está intrínsecamente relacionado con el derecho de todos a una vida sana.

Objetivo: Analizar la percepción de los profesores sobre la *advocacy* en la enfermería y debatir estrategias para promover la *advocacy* para el trabajador docente universitario de enfermería.

Metodología: Estudio descriptivo y exploratorio de enfoque cualitativo realizado en dos universidades públicas localizadas en el municipio de Río de Janeiro, Brasil. Los participantes fueron 14 profesores de enfermería. Se utilizó el grupo focal y los datos fueron analizados con la técnica de análisis de contenido.

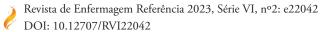
Resultados: Se destaca la *advocacy* como actividad imprescindible para lograr la defensa de los intereses de la categoría profesional, así como la utilización de los medios de comunicación como estrategia de difusión del trabajo de enfermería, incluidos los docentes de enfermería.

Conclusión: La *advocacy* es una estrategia de promoción y valoración del profesorado de enfermería en las universidades y es necesario invertir en esta estrategia como recurso fundamental para la promoción de la valoración profesional.

Palabras clave: abogacía en salud; condiciones de trabajo; profesora de enfermería, enfermería

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Introduction

This study focuses on the work of nursing teachers in public universities and the theory of advocacy as a means of claiming their rights. Advocacy consists of claiming a right and involves defending public policies articulated before the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, as well as the public ministry. Thus, understanding it requires raising awareness and mobilizing opinion-makers and the general public to encourage the actions of public authorities (Silva, 2017).

Nursing in Brazil comprises 2,619,894 active nursing professionals, 665,643 of whom are nurses (Conselho Federal de Enfermagem [COFEN], 2022). This group works in different sectors of the economy, such as equipment, health services, public and private hospitals and outpatient clinics, and educational institutions for technical and university training. Studies on the working conditions of nurses in Brazil point to insulting salaries, long working hours, and undignified rest in shift work, among others (Soares et al., 2021).

Regarding the search for better working conditions, the university teacher's work and its configuration are highlighted here. University teachers experience longer working hours, work overload, and job insecurity. Thus, changes in this context are important and necessary through the strengthening of the collective self, the resistance, and the production of knowledge that backs healthy policies and actions for these workers, emphasizing the relevance of the principles of advocacy in universities. It is worth mentioning the role of the university teacher as an opinion maker and an influencer of new professionals.

Moreover, it is essential to create mechanisms to fight against the invasion of working time in the teachers' personal lives, as well as against the domination and control of their own lives, by rescuing autonomy, freedom, creation, and human and social emancipation, enabling this group to have a better quality of life (Rodrigues et al., 2020).

Quality of life is a relevant management aspect when it comes to the development of actions to promote workers' health, to prevent them from getting sick while doing their job. In the context of neoliberalism, efforts should be made to implement actions that promote teachers' quality of life (Cacciari et al., 2017).

Teachers are burdened by stress, social pathologies, and syndromes caused by overwork. This is largely caused by poor working conditions in universities. Thus, investing in strategies that improve working conditions and motivate teachers is of great relevance for promoting their quality of life (Koch et al., 2018).

In this context, the use of advocacy for good working conditions for nursing teachers may also influence the improvement of nursing work as a whole. Furthermore, advocacy is understudied in the Brazilian context since studies are scarce, and the term is applied as a necessary practice for the empowerment of nursing (Silva, 2017). Thus, this study aimed to analyze the perception of teachers about advocacy in nursing and discuss the strategies to promote advocacy for university teachers (Silva, 2017).

Background

Advocacy falls into the area of public policy, as it consists of the defense of a cause, according to collective interests, through mobilizations and articulations promoted by civil society to give greater visibility to a certain cause and influence managers and policymakers (Silva, 2017). Therefore, it comprises the process of raising awareness among opinion makers and the population that implement actions resulting in a paradigm shift on a certain topic, influencing policies that will transform society and encouraging the actions of public authorities. This theme is growing in Brazil, as it is intrinsically linked to the exercise of democracy by expanding social participation in decisions (Silva, 2017). It is possible to implement advocacy by social actors in different spaces, including promoting their culture in social spaces, whether in the community, in expert committees, public seminars, events, or committee meetings, among others. Understanding advocacy in different scenarios nowadays is a fruitful and necessary path of investigation (Mafra, 2014). Advocacy in health relates to the ethical and democratic aspects of individuals in the demand for people's right to health (Mendes et al., 2019). Thus, it adds knowledge that empowers the social actors and contributes to the democratic rule of law.

Advocacy in nursing seeks to contribute to the right to health, which falls within the field of human rights since it is intrinsically related to the right to a healthy life. Thus, as a strategy, it seeks to reduce inequities, whether in the population under nursing care or seeking better working conditions for workers. It can be a powerful and transforming action to achieve better living conditions (Albuquerque et al., 2019). In this sense, advocacy goes hand in hand with nursing, considering the profession's relationship with human rights, the right to life, and human dignity. In fact, nurses have an ethical obligation to defend the most vulnerable in their practice (Granito et al., 2021). It is worth considering that advocacy in nursing is considered a beneficial practice in health due to its positive influence on the psychosocial aspects of the subjects involved (Menezes et al., 2021).

Considering the political nature of the constructs of advocacy, the role of nursing teachers presupposes the dissemination of knowledge in universities. However, professionals must respect the principles of justice and equity. Thus, their purpose will be the defense of human rights and the health of individuals or social groups in disadvantaged situations. It also seeks empowerment for health care (Albuquerque et al., 2019).

The principles of advocacy can help mitigate the precarious situation of teachers since they need to be healthy and motivated to develop their activities willingly. After all, teachers train and qualify others to contribute to life in society.



Research Question

How do university teachers perceive advocacy and their strategies for using it?

Methodology

A qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive study was carried out according to the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research), which is a study guide composed of 32 items considered necessary for the development of qualitative studies (Buss & Perron, 2020). The study was conducted in two public universities located in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a state university (University A) and a federal university (University B). These two institutions were chosen because they have their own specificities in their faculty staffing management models, thus contributing to a greater richness of data.

The nursing faculty of University A has four departments: Public Health Nursing, Fundamentals of Nursing, Maternal and Child Nursing, and Medical-Surgical Nursing. The School of Nursing at University B has five departments: Public Health Nursing, Fundamentals of Nursing, Maternal and Child Nursing, Medical-Surgical Nursing, and Nursing Methodology.

The study participants were 14 nursing teachers from both universities mentioned above, eight teachers from University A, and six teachers from University B. These teachers develop teaching, research, and extension activities. The inclusion criterion was professors who had a statutory employment contract or temporary contracts as substitute teachers who had been working at these locations for at least one year. This temporal criterion is based on the perception that one year is enough time to understand and discuss the working conditions and process. The exclusion criterion was not conducting teaching activities, as well as being on leave or vacation during the data collection period. Data were collected through the focus group, which is a data collection and analysis technique that promotes well-being and quality of life.

The collection was carried out by one of the authors and four study assistants, two research fellows, and two volunteers. Initially, the study was presented to the participants, who then signed the Free and Informed Consent Form. Then, the focus group was moderated by the principal investigator who read the guiding questions and validated the answers at the end of the session.

The study assistants collaborated in the observation of behaviors and expressions, as well as in obtaining statements, which were audio recorded on a cell phone. They also helped to time the duration of two focus groups, which lasted about two hours each. Thus, the research question was discussed: a) What is advocacy and what are the strategies for promoting advocacy in nursing?

Data were analyzed using the content analysis technique involving three steps: pre-analysis, material exploration and treatment of results, inference and interpretation (Bardin, 2016). Three categories emerged, which will be described in the results section.

This study followed the guidelines of Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council, and the research project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committees of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the co--participating institution, the State University of Rio de Janeiro. They were approved with the respective numbers: Anna Nery School of Nursing, Opinion Number: 3.752.545, Ethics Committee Approval Certificate: 225587919.0.0000.5238 and co-participating UERJ, Opinion Number: 3.804.886, Ethics Committee Approval Certificate: 25587919.0.3001.5282.

Results

The results will be analyzed based on the following categories: Advocacy, a necessary strategy for university nursing teaching; Support networks and partnership strengthening for the protection of workers; and Media investment: a necessary action for the strengthening of nursing teaching.

Advocacy, a necessary strategy for nursing teaching in universities

In the context of teaching, thinking about advocacy for this professional group brings up the profession's organization and the insertion of the group's representatives in the political environment. Having support networks based on the union of the group for the common good is important.

I think advocacy relates to organization in nursing. We have to be more represented in policymaking. [P2]

Thinking strategically, we have to have faculty representatives from public universities. So I think organization is fundamental. [P7]

We need to invest in education in our country. Our country is rich, but we have to fight for this right for everyone in policymaking. [P11]

Supported by the thought of unity, the participants perceive advocacy as a necessary practice for advancing the defense of the professional category's interests, as well as the representation of the group in the political environment. Partnerships and representativeness are important for the advancement of nursing education.

Support networks and partnership strengthening for workers' protection

Regarding the support needed to face the teachers' work issues, the participants highlight the need for support networks, as well as establishing partnerships and strengthening nursing as a profession. Thus, groups and partnerships bring about good articulations, which contribute to the development and strengthening of good work. Articulations are necessary, articulations between universities for everyone to know each other for exchanges. [P3] Researching is not easy, you have to have a support network, including for publishing and decreasing costs. [P14]



We need to create collective social spaces, create support groups. [P1]

University teachers suggested the creation of spaces for exchange between universities as a strategy for collective socializing. The need for scientific publication and the increasing demands of university work call for the need for supportive relationships between the groups. In this sense, the university needs to articulate collective meetings in study centers and social groups.

Media investment: a necessary action to strengthen teaching in nursing

The participants pointed out media promotion as an important advocacy strategy in nursing. The work developed needs to be disseminated as a strategic action for the promotion of the nursing collective. There is a need for articulation between the class organizations so that society knows the work developed in nursing and by nursing teachers.

Our work is a work of art. We need to think about the collective and disseminate our work. [P14]

We are largely invisible as nursing teachers and producers of knowledge. COREN and ABEN need to invest in media. [P9]

I think we have to have a good social communication department at the university. [P1]

The invisibility of the work of nursing teachers and the need to reinvent the strategies adopted to promote the profession as a producer of science stand out in the reports of the participants. The constant need to defend the interests of patients, students, and teachers is pointed out as part of the daily work.

Discussion

Advocacy, a necessary strategy for university teaching in nursing

With regard to advocacy for nursing teaching, the teachers perceived it as a new concept in the field of nursing. However, the importance of this strategy to achieve rights and promote quality of life at work is clear.

Both advocacy and policy advocacy mean the defense of interests that can be questioned before the judiciary, legislative, and executive branches of government, the Public Ministry, and the media, among others. With this purpose, they seek to raise awareness among opinion makers and mobilize the population to interpose demands and propose actions to public authorities, aiming at social change and concept change about any given topic (Silva, 2017).

The term advocacy is related to the demand for rights. In health, it is understood as the demand for health rights for individuals or groups. It is ruled by a theory based on overcoming inequities in health (Oliveira & Silva, 2018). Advocacy seeks equity through policies and actions to improve the living and health conditions of individuals or groups in society. Its goal is to protect living conditions and the principles of equity and justice. It is based on the demand for health rights for disadvantaged people or groups, helping to empower them with a view to achieving health outcomes, better working conditions, and quality of life.

In academia, universities, and nursing practice settings, the poor working conditions experienced by nurses and nursing teachers in Brazil are evident. Therefore, there is an urgent need for advocacy in nursing, based on the human rights theory, for the demand for health and quality of life in universities.

Currently, universities are affected by countless economic and political crises, as well as by crises in teaching work influenced by neoliberal capitalism, with an impact on teachers' way of working, which is based on productivity. The university is a public good and a social right of Brazilian citizens and needs to be reinforced (Soares et al., 2021).

Support networks and partnership strengthening for workers' protection

There is a need for public and institutional policies that value university teachers, including nursing teachers, aiming at providing a healthy lifestyle in the university career, which results in health promotion through a favorable academic environment (Silveira et al., 2017). Strengthening partnerships and support networks for teachers is a goal to be achieved.

In this sense, advocacy in nursing is not perceived as the exercise of the legal profession but as the action guided by the ethical and democratic philosophy in the pursuit of promoting patients', care providers, and nursing teachers' health (Silveira et al., 2017).

The importance of social support and the influence of stress among teachers are highlighted, pointing out the direct or moderating action of stress and its implications in the work process in universities. Thus, this study identified the need to create support networks for students and teachers and to carry out actions to plan the future of universities (Almeida et al., 2018).

Studies point out that there is a relationship between the number of supporters and satisfaction with the support network and social support. Therefore, creating support networks among teachers is highly relevant to the maintenance of health and quality of life. Therefore, investing in advocacy among teachers can contribute to the creation of these networks (Almeida et al., 2018).

In this sense, the teachers' working time management must be discussed since it can shed light on the nursing teacher's work process. This can be explained by the fact that, according to the neoliberal logic, teachers currently face work production external to the university, causing task overload (Costa et al., 2017; Godinho, et al., 2019). A study conducted with workers from a public university shows that there is an urgent need to implement actions for the management of risks and working conditions which are related to the low social support experienced by workers in the workplace. Thus, the study suggests balanced measures to promote the existing social relations for a better quality of life for workers of all levels. It also proposes the implementation of a support and partnership program that fosters better working conditions, supportive



relationships, and networking inside and outside of work (Costa et al., 2017; Godinho, et al., 2019).

Creating support networks and partnerships can help mitigate the effects of work stress, promoting worker health. In this sense, planning actions aimed at health at work is fundamental.

Media investment: a necessary action to strengthen teaching in nursing

It is imperative to consider social and traditional media as an advocacy strategy in the neoliberal and postmodern world. Professional marketing can help favor greater visibility of the nursing teaching profession and in other fields of nursing action. It is necessary to implement actions aimed at greater credibility of the profession and better quality of its services (Mendes et al., 2019).

After all, only with national policies that value nursing will nursing professionals feel motivated to continue in the profession. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) points out that nursing is the backbone of health systems. This concept repeated to member countries explains that nursing needs to be strengthened (Cardoso et al., 2014; Mendes et al., 2019).

The vision of Nursing in Brazil follows a stereotype that does not contribute to the strengthening of the category. Most of the time, when the media addresses nursing, it is about nursing errors. News items do not clarify the activities of the profession. It is believed that it is due to media professionals' lack of knowledge in this area, resulting in precarious information. Thus, Nursing issues the challenge of promoting the knowledge of the profession through the media. Florence Nightingale's principles of educating, caring, and teaching in the nursing profession need to be disseminated in society (Reis et al., 2019).

One study points out that media professionals report the need for disseminating nursing activities at all levels by nursing professionals: care, teaching, research, and management as a way to overcome the social paradigms imposed on the profession. Achieving this goal will result in the profession's greater social recognition (Reis et al., 2019).

As a limitation, the study was conducted in two public universities in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Further studies should be conducted in other universities that make up the five regions of the country, whether public or private in the State of Rio de Janeiro, to expand the hearing of the teaching category.

Conclusion

Advocacy is a possible option for ensuring the implementation of constitutional rights and the strengthening of universities and teachers. It helps to promote support networks and partnerships necessary to achieve the objectives proposed by the teachers in the development of labor actions and protection of university nursing teachers in Brazil.

The strategies pointed out by the participants included the need to enhance work organization, especially regarding

collective work and reorganizing the work process, respecting the individuality of each teacher and integrating the undergraduate and postgraduate spaces. This strategy must occur through institutional policies that strengthen the collective, the integration of projects, and the creation of exchange spaces since, in the postmodern world, in the liquid world, relationships are unstable and everything is fluid, which generates the feeling of instability.

In conclusion, advocacy is an important strategy for valuing university nursing teachers. Advocating for better working conditions and satisfactory work organization implies advocating for rights. Investment is needed as it is a strategy for promoting professional development. Moreover, this study contributed to the advancement of knowledge in university nursing teaching and pointed out the strategies that promote the empowerment of nursing professionals and the aspects in need of intervention to improve the working conditions of teachers.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Farias, S. N. P., Silva, K. G., Souza, N. V.

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Writing – analysis and editing: Farias, S. N., Silva, K. G., Soares, S. S., Carvalho, E. C., Varella, T. C., Souza, N. V.

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