

Valuing the work of Nursing: mainstay of the Brazilian health system

Valorização do trabalho da Enfermagem: sustentáculo do sistema de saúde brasileiro

Valorando el trabajo de la Enfermería: pilar del sistema de salud brasileño

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We have been facing difficult times, marked by a pandemic that devastated the world and that was intensely lived in Brazil. These have been times of great partisan polarization, of fake news, of infodemics. Times when the living and working conditions of nursing, pillar and mainstay of the Brazilian health system, were revealed, but also times of opportunities to reflect on all this and to act. It's time for ACTION!

When we talk about time, it is important to consider the meaning attributed by the Greeks to the words *Kairós* (time as opportunity) and *Cronos* (chronological time, in its duration)¹. The origin of the term allows us to look at time from the perspective of opportunity and its meaning for a category that is devalued over chronological time and that finds an opportunity to fight for rights, recognition, and appreciation.

In times of a pandemic, faced with a harsh and difficult reality, with the loss of more than 684 thousand lives, among them those of nursing professionals, one has witnessed the inadequate working conditions and psychological suffering of professionals of care, as well as the context of deepening of ultra-neoliberal policies; the lack of funding for health, with attempts to dismantle the Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde* – SUS) — the system that held back the pandemic crisis in the country; and the worsening of the economic, political, social, and environmental crisis in the country.

In 2020, the International Year of Nursing professionals was celebrated, exactly when the world was experiencing

one of the worst pandemic crises. Nursing resisted despite all the suffering, the compromise of the physical and mental health of professionals, the precariousness of work, and the impacts on the mental health of the worker; despite the high level of professionals with burnout, depression, pathological anxiety, and panic syndrome; the suffering resulting from the shortage of personal protective equipment; the fragility in the description of protocols and flows for the effective control of infections; the extension of working hours and inadequate professional training².

Nursing showed its strength and its important role and protagonism in care, research and teaching, providing care and comfort to those who were isolated in hospitals and who could not see or say goodbye to their families; it innovated by using different strategies to alleviate the suffering of patients, used technology to bring them closer to their families and friends; implemented COVID-19 prevention measures; developed care protocols, based on the best available evidence; promoted permanent education of the team; developed and published research results, highlighting factors associated with contamination, suffering, high workload, and all the impacts reported here.

With the restrictive measures, face-to-face teaching for nurses and nursing technicians is no longer offered. However, nursing teachers across the country mobilized to use technologies to teach and research remotely³.

Nursing, in all areas, continued to provide its important work and the world/country began to exalt this role, but it was not enough! We had been living in a *Kairós* time, an

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Received: 09/06/2022 – Approved: 09/12/2022

<https://doi.org/10.5327/Z1414-442520222840>

opportune time filled with meaning, to unite as a category and mobilize ourselves politically. And so it was done!!

There was a mobilization to highlight the importance of nursing work against the COVID-19 pandemic, which has always been and still is undeniable; to show Brazilian society the real working conditions and the challenges imposed throughout the pandemic period. More vehement debates on the changes experienced in the ways of teaching, managing, researching, and caring started to take place. We critically mobilized and participated in political, associative, and social movements; we built responses to the challenges and showed how we could, based on the lessons learned, move forward to improve the conditions of the profession in the health scenario⁴. And so, we deeply debated the subject at the 82nd and 83rd Brazilian Nursing Week, in 2021 and 2022, respectively, through the themes “Nursing work in the context of crisis” and “Nursing in the pandemic context by COVID-19: what lessons have we learned?”. We have learned many lessons!

In addition to these initiatives, we continued to defend that *Nursing is Health, Health is Democracy, and the Right to Health is to Win the Social and Political Struggle!* For this, it is necessary to resist and continue hoping, since there are many strengths in the spaces of professional struggle, together with associations, union entities, along with the student movement, popular movements. We are many bodies, minds, and souls that do not give up and that, together, will make a difference. Health is a struggle, a political struggle in defense of health, SUS, and education for all! Defending rights, resisting setbacks, and advancing transformations!⁵

Armed with this fighting spirit, in an action coordinated by the National Nursing Forum, which brings together entities representing the category, we won the approval of Bill 2564/2020, in all instances, and the publication of Law No. 14.434/2022, which institutes the national salary floor for nurses, nursing technicians, and nursing assistants⁶.

We cannot “let our guard down”, as the interests of corporate groups and health entrepreneurs who make

absurd bills come with full force, as happened on September 4th, 2022, when the Minister of the Federal Supreme Court Luís Roberto Barroso suspended the effects of Law No. 14.434/2022, which established the minimum wage for nurses⁷. The class is mobilizing and once again showing its gigantism and the expression of a workforce made up of 2,723,804 professionals!

In times of so much intensification of interests and political forces, of so many cuts and the dismantling of public policies socially conquered in decades, when elections are approaching, we need to continue mobilizing ourselves as a category.

The Brazilian Nursing Association - SP Section (*Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem – Seção SP – ABEn-SP*) repudiates the decision of Minister Barroso of the STF to suspend the salary floor of Brazilian Nursing for 60 days. Such a decision represents devaluation and total disrespect for nursing, which is the pillar and mainstay of the Brazilian health system. The minimum wage of R\$ 4,750.00 is the minimum for professionals with a university education and who need constant updating in the performance of their duties related to the provision of safe and quality care to the Brazilian population.

Facing COVID-19 by them saved thousands of lives, but also took the lives of nursing professionals who took care of people. This needs to be recognized and valued. Brazil owes, at least, this floor to Nursing.

FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares there is no conflict of interests.

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