

THE ROLE

OF NURSES IN HEALTH SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT: LEADING THE TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS PERSON-CENTERED CARE

EL ROL DE LAS ENFERMERAS EN LA GESTIÓN DE LOS SISTEMAS DE SALUD: LIDERANDO LA TRANSFORMACIÓN HACIA LA ATENCIÓN CENTRADA EN LA PERSONA

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ABSTRACT

The development of health systems has emphasized the need for more humanized, equitable, and patient-centered approaches. In this context, nurses play a key role in transforming healthcare, thanks to their proximity to patients, their integrated training, and their active participation at all levels of care. This article analyzes the primary role of nurses in health systems management and their contribution to decision-making, quality improvement, care coordination, and the people-centered approach available in the systematic review. The results showed that nursing stands out for its holistic approach and adaptability in equidistant, person-centered care. It concludes with suggestions on how to strengthen their status as agents of change. The objective is to determine the role of nurses in health systems management, as a contribution to a patient-centered care model with health personnel, and to propose strategies to improve their management.

Keywords:

Role of the nurse, management, health system, personal care.

RESUMEN

El desarrollo de los sistemas de salud ha enfatizado la necesidad de enfoques más humanizados, más justos y centrados. En este contexto, las enfermeras juegan un papel clave en la conversión de la atención médica, gracias a su proximidad al paciente, su formación integrada y su participación activa en todos los niveles de atención. Este artículo analiza el papel principal de las enfermeras en la gestión de los sistemas de salud y su contribución a la toma de decisiones, la mejora de la calidad, la coordinación de la atención y las personas en las personas disponibles en la revisión sistemática. Los resultados mostraron que la enfermería destaca por su enfoque integral y adaptabilidad en la atención equidistante en la persona. Se cierra con sugerencias sobre cómo fortalecer su condición como agentes de cambio. El objetivo determinar cómo es el papel de las enfermeras en la gestión de los sistemas de salud, como una contribución a un modelo de atención centrado en el paciente con el personal de salud y proponer estrategias para mejorar su gestión.

Palabras clave:

Rol de la enfermera, gestión, sistema de salud, atención a la persona.



INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, global healthcare systems have undergone profound transformations driven by scientific advances, demographic shifts, technological innovations, and new social demands. These changes have made it clear that healthcare cannot be sustained solely by hierarchical models centered on traditional physicians, but rather requires the active and strategic participation of multiple stakeholders, among whom nursing has taken on an undisputed role. Nurses, traditionally viewed as executors of clinical indications, have evolved toward a leadership role capable of directly influencing strategic decisions, resource management, and the formulation of health policies.

The recognition of nursing as an autonomous discipline and a pillar of health systems has not been an immediate process, but rather the result of years of training, specialization, research, and accumulated experience in diverse contexts. Today, nurses are not only present on the front lines of care, but also in hospital management, community program coordination, and the development of innovative care models. This leadership is characterized by a comprehensive vision that combines technical competencies, a humanistic approach, communication skills, critical thinking, and the ability to work collaboratively with other healthcare professionals.

In this context, the concept of person-centered care has emerged as one of the guiding principles for the modernization of healthcare systems. This model recognizes the patient as an active subject with individual values, beliefs, needs, and expectations, and proposes that all healthcare decisions revolve around their overall well-being. Nurses, due to their constant proximity to people and communities, are in a privileged position to promote this approach, adapting interventions to the cultural, social, and family realities of each individual, thus contributing to improving the quality of care and clinical outcomes.

The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for strong nursing leadership capable of responding swiftly to emergencies, reorganizing services, coordinating interdisciplinary teams, and ensuring continuity of care under extreme conditions. Far from limiting themselves to healthcare tasks, nurses demonstrated their ability to design and implement public health strategies, manage scarce resources, and lead technological and organizational innovation projects. These lessons, combined with scientific evidence on the positive impact of nursing on the efficiency and equity of health systems, underscore the urgency of strengthening their training in leadership, management, and public policy.

The current healthcare system faces complex challenges such as an aging population, the rise of chronic diseases, inequity in access, and the need for

sustainability. Given this situation, a person-centered approach is required, one that respects the individual's autonomy, preferences, and context. Nurses, due to their privileged position in direct care and their training in holistic care, are called to lead this change.

The nursing professional is located at the center of direct care of people, families and communities, which guarantees cooperation with the health team, from a dynamic and responsible act in which human values stand out to give people the well with quality and consistency, from mild patients to the most critical and corresponding to their rapid recovery protocols (Castillo Ayón et al., 2023).

However, achieving the full transformative potential of nursing leadership requires overcoming historical barriers such as underrepresentation in decision-making positions, gender stereotypes, and insufficient recognition of their strategic contributions. Addressing these challenges is not only a matter of professional equity, but also a necessity to ensure more resilient, inclusive, and people-centered health systems.

In this context, this paper analyzes the role of nurses in the management of health systems, highlighting how their leadership drives the transition toward more humane, effective, and sustainable models of care. Through a review of experiences, conceptual frameworks, and scientific evidence, we seek to demonstrate that nursing leadership is not a complement, but an indispensable element in transforming healthcare in the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a systematic review methodology aimed at analyzing the role of nurses in health systems management and their contribution to person-centered care. Data collection involved a comprehensive search of peer-reviewed articles, official reports, and case studies across multiple databases, focusing on publications from the last five years. The selected sources were analyzed to identify themes related to nursing leadership, decision-making, care coordination, quality improvement, and implementation of person-centered approaches.

Information was synthesized through qualitative content analysis, highlighting patterns, best practices, and evidence-based strategies that illustrate the impact of nursing on healthcare management. Emphasis was placed on studies demonstrating practical applications in clinical, community, and administrative contexts, including experiences from diverse geographical and organizational settings. This approach allowed for a holistic understanding of the strategic role of nurses, integrating both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to support conclusions and recommendations for strengthening nursing leadership in contemporary health systems.

DEVELOPMENT

Historically, the role of nursing was associated with subordinate and executive tasks, limited to following medical instructions and performing support functions. However, the advancement of the discipline, changes in healthcare demands, and the progressive recognition of professional competencies have substantially transformed this landscape. Today, nurses have established themselves as protagonists and leaders in clinical, administrative, and strategic decision-making, being recognized as essential agents in the transformation and sustainability of healthcare systems.

This new positioning is based on a combination of technical and transversal competencies, including a humanistic, person-centered vision, communication skills that facilitate effective interaction with patients and multidisciplinary teams, decision-making based on scientific evidence, and a collaborative approach that favors the integration of different perspectives in the planning and execution of care (Del Río Urenda et al., 2022). Their role as resource managers, team coordinators, and guarantors of care quality has allowed them to join steering committees, participate in strategic planning processes, and contribute to the design and implementation of public policies that strengthen the equity and efficiency of care.

Within this framework of professional evolution, the person-centered care model represents one of the most significant contributions of contemporary nursing. This model is based on recognizing each patient as a unique human being, with their own values, beliefs, needs, and expectations, placing them at the center of all clinical and organizational decisions (Ramos Feijóo & Francés García, 2021). Nurses, due to their daily contact with individuals and families, are the main drivers of this approach, establishing therapeutic relationships based on trust, fostering open communication, and ensuring that patients actively participate in the development and monitoring of their care plans.

Furthermore, they adapt interventions to the specific needs of the family, social, and cultural environment, ensuring that care is comprehensive and culturally sensitive. The application of this model, both in hospital and community settings, has demonstrated improvements in patient satisfaction, a reduction in adverse events, improved therapeutic adherence, and optimization of available resources.

The impact of nursing leadership extends beyond the immediate clinical setting. Their participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of community health programs has generated significant impacts on public health indicators. Nurse-led interventions have reduced avoidable hospitalizations, improved the control of chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, and increased the coverage of preventive programs in hard-to-reach populations (Armas Ferrer

et al., 2023). These actions are especially relevant in rural contexts and vulnerable communities, where nurses are often the first, and sometimes the only, point of entry into the healthcare system. Programs such as home nursing, proactive monitoring of chronic patients, and the implementation of integrated care networks have demonstrated not only clinical effectiveness but also economic and operational sustainability. Their leadership capacity in highly complex environments, combined with their in-depth knowledge of the social and cultural fabric of communities, allows them to design solutions adapted to diverse realities.

For this leadership to continue strengthening, sustained investment in continuing education that includes competencies in healthcare management, clinical leadership, and public policy formulation is essential (Castrillón Agudelo, 2020). Educational institutions and health organizations must ensure that these competencies are integrated into undergraduate curricula and promote postgraduate programs focused on leadership and innovation in nursing practice. Likewise, the active inclusion of nurses in research is crucial, as the generation of knowledge allows for decisions to be based on solid evidence and, at the same time, highlights the real impact of nursing on improving the quality, safety, and efficiency of health systems.

However, these transformative potential faces obstacle that limit its full development. The underrepresentation of nurses in management positions, the persistence of gender stereotypes that underestimate their capabilities, and insufficient institutional recognition of their contribution to healthcare management remain outstanding challenges. Overcoming these barriers requires not only regulatory changes but also a cultural shift that values diverse leadership and promotes equal opportunities. Experiences such as that of Edgardo Olivo in Argentina are an inspiring example: after a professional career entirely dedicated to nursing, Olivo became the first nurse to lead the Joseph Lister Hospital in Entre Ríos, marking a milestone in the history of hospital management (Jara, 2023).

Her leadership, supported by ongoing training, an ethical commitment to patients, and the ability to lead teams in highly demanding situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates that when professional autonomy is fostered and work environments that value the voice and experience of nurses are created, health systems become more resilient, inclusive, and effective. Investing in nursing leadership is not only a matter of professional justice, but a key strategy to ensure the sustainability, equity, and quality of the health systems of the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Nursing leadership is essential to addressing the current challenges facing healthcare systems, providing a

person-centered perspective, management skills, and innovative capacity. The profession has transcended its traditionally subordinate role to establish itself as a strategic player in clinical and administrative decision-making and in the design of public policies.

The person-centered care model, largely promoted by nurses, has been shown to improve the quality of care, increase user satisfaction, and reduce adverse events. Their active participation in the transformation of health systems, especially in rural settings and with vulnerable populations, has demonstrated effectiveness, sustainability, and a positive impact on public health indicators.

However, structural obstacles persist, such as limited representation in leadership positions and gender stereotypes, which require urgent attention to fully unleash the transformative potential of this leadership.

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