

## SPECIALIZATION COURSE IN NURSING MANAGEMENT: IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS FROM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

CURSO DE ESPECIALIZAÇÃO EM GESTÃO EM ENFERMAGEM:  
PROPOSTAS DE MELHORIAS SEGUNDO DISCENTES

CURSO DE ESPECIALIZACIÓN EN GESTIÓN EN ENFERMERÍA:  
PROPUESTAS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES PARA MEJORARLO

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to recognize suggestions for improvement of the syllabus of the Specialization Course in Nursing Management - distance learning mode course, according to the students' opinions. It is a quantitative and exploratory study, in which 216 students participated, from September to December 2010. 211 suggestions were listed and classified using investigator triangulation. Facing the needs of the practice felt by the students, suggestions (81.5%) related to the content of syllabus were predominant. Suggestions were highlighted related to the following disciplines: Health Information Management (18.5%), Nursing Management (19.9%). A higher correlation of content with the practice of nurses inserted in public primary health care was proposed (7.6%). Also, the students contributed teaching strategies, suggesting more practical examples (47.3%) and video-classes (26.2%). The results were considered within the educational-learning course design, which goes beyond the syllabus content, reaching teaching strategies, valuing and realizing the active participation of students in the teaching-learning process of this course.

**Keywords:** Education, Distance; Specialization; Nursing.

### RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo foi conhecer as sugestões de melhoria dadas pelos alunos do curso de Especialização em Gestão em Enfermagem - modalidade à distância - sobre seus conteúdos programáticos. Trata-se de estudo exploratório do qual participaram 216 especializandos, entre setembro e dezembro de 2010. Listaram-se 211 sugestões que foram classificadas utilizando-se a triangulação de investigador. Frente à necessidade sentida na prática dos discentes, predominaram sugestões (81,5%) sobre conteúdos programáticos pertencentes ao curso. Tiveram destaque os relacionados às disciplinas: Gestão da Informação em Saúde (18,5%) e Gerenciamento de Enfermagem (19,9%). Propôs-se maior correlação dos conteúdos com a prática de enfermeiros inseridos em serviços públicos da atenção básica (7,6%). Ainda, contribuíram com estratégias de ensino, citando mais exemplos práticos (47,3%) e videoaulas (26,2%). Os resultados foram considerados dentro do projeto didático-pedagógico do curso, extrapolando os conteúdos programáticos às estratégias de ensino, valorizando e concretizando a participação ativa dos alunos no processo ensino-aprendizagem desse curso.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação à Distância; Especialização; Enfermagem.

### RESUMEN

Investigación realizada con miras a conocer las propuestas de los estudiantes para mejorar el plan de estudios del curso a distancia Especialización en Gestión en Enfermería. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio cuantitativo llevado a cabo con 216 alumnos entre septiembre y diciembre de 2010. Se realizó una lista de 211 propuestas que se clasificaron con triangulación de investigadores. Predominaron las propuestas referentes al plan de estudios del curso (81,5%), sobre todo referentes a asignaturas tales como Gestión de Información en Salud (18,5%) y Gestión de Enfermería (19,9%). Se propuso mayor correlación entre el contenido y la práctica de los enfermeros que trabajan en la atención primaria de la salud (7,6%), se mencionaron estrategias de enseñanza y se citaron ejemplos prácticos (46,3%) y clases de video (26,2%). Los resultados fueron considerados dentro del alcance del proyecto didáctico - pedagógico del curso. Van todavía más allá del plan de estudios y de las estrategias de enseñanza, valorando y afirmando la participación activa de los alumnos en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de este curso.

**Palabras-clave:** Educación a Distancia; Especialización; Enfermería.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, public educational policies encourage the incorporation of innovations in information and communication technologies and techniques of distance learning education (DLE) to didactic teaching methods, promoting education according to the new necessities of the individuals, country and in agreement with global trends.<sup>1</sup>

The last census of the Brazilian Association for Distance Education reported more than five million students have enrolled in distance learning courses in Brazil, coming from all regions of the country. The survey revealed that, between 2011 and 2012, enrollment in these courses increased 12.2%, more than classroom learning.<sup>2</sup>

Special features of distance learning courses, such as physical and sometimes temporal distance, between students and professors, involve careful planning, especially regarding syllabus content. Among other aspects, the content should be elaborated to meet, as best as possible, social and individual needs of the students merged in a certain environment.<sup>3</sup>

One of the principles guiding the "good practices" of DLE suggest the involvement of the students in the elaboration and evaluation of the courses, enabling the co-creation of interactive and coherent courses. Authors highlight that students must have the opportunity to provide feedback on the curricula content, increasing its significance to them.<sup>4</sup>

A few decades ago, the syllabus content was built according to a minimum curriculum, which included the use of books that were the basis for all activities in a course. Today, however, the educational authorities only define the curriculum guidelines.<sup>3</sup>

For evaluation of content, different references can be used, such as the Referential for Quality in Undergraduate Distance Education, proposed by the Ministry of Education (MEC).<sup>5</sup> From existing national and international models, educational institutions propose instruments to assess distance learning courses, which evaluate the course design, elaboration of its content, even the indicators of the obtained results, but few assessment tools are validated.<sup>6</sup>

Evaluation has been always a controversial theme, because it emits judgment value on the quality of a given product. This fact is also true in the analysis of distance learning courses. This process protects the interests of students and courses, and already occurs in many countries, as India, Australia, United Kingdom and United States of America.<sup>7</sup>

In Brazil, in 2010, the "Assessment Instrument of Undergraduate Courses: Bachelor and Licentiate" was approved for distance education, which is now used by the Federal System of Undergraduate Education, but, the instrument was not developed for evaluation of distance learning courses in *sensu lato* mode.<sup>8</sup>

Being aware of the importance and need to systematically review the content offered by the *sensu lato* distance courses

dynamically, following the information and advance of knowledge and in a manner to meet the demands inherent to the professional practice, the Specialization Course in Nursing Management Distance Learning Mode invested in this form of assessment since its first edition in 2009.

The course was conducted through a partnership between the Federal University of Sao Paulo (UNIFESP) and the Open University of Brazil, created to prepare the nurse to act as manager of healthcare services. The aim was to enable the nurse to use modern management tools, and make him or her capable of searching data in literature, thus providing subsidies for the efficient management of resources on their institutions. It also held focus on the professional context of students, so they can perform in modifying their experiences.<sup>9</sup>

This course included a workload of 416 hours and lasted one year. The curriculum was composed by 12 courses: Learning Environment, Introduction to General Management, Nursing Management, Human Resource Management, Health Information Management, Management of Financial Resources, Management of Physical and Material Resources, Assessment in Healthcare, Research Methods, Trends in Management, Marketing in Health and Orientation for Monograph Delivery.

Thus, considering the importance in evaluating the syllabus content of distance learning courses and its urgency to produce subsidies that allow adaptation of the content to different realities and professional needs of the students, the present study aimed to assess the opinion of the students of Specialization Course in Nursing Management Distance Learning Mode (CEGEMD) on the syllabus offered.

## METHODS

This is a retrospective exploratory study of quantitative approach, approved by the Ethics in Research Committee of UNIFESP 2119/11, which uses the methodological framework of formative evaluation research. The first works in this format are from the seventeenth century and were directed to evaluating social programs. In the twentieth century, it gained greater visibility in the fields of education and health, aiming toward improvement and more suggestions in a particular context. This type of study enables finding contextualized data and, from the evidence, to identify what can be corrected, improved and adapted to be closer to the pre-established goals in the teaching-learning process.<sup>10</sup>

Data collection was conducted during the presentations of the final papers, in the period of September-December 2010, performed in person in the classroom.

The 216 students who completed the course agreed to participate in the study by signing an informed consent. The students were from eight stations: Breves – PA – eight (3.7%); Parauapebas – PA – five (2.3%); Palmas – TO – 22 (10.2%);

Juara-MT – seven (3.2%); Itapetininga-SP – 34 (15.8%); Jandira-SP – 61 (28.2%); Sao Carlos-SP – 34 (15.7%) and Sao Jose dos Campos-SP – 45 (20.9%).

The research instrument consisted of a questionnaire with the following questions: "Do you suggest the inclusion of some content which was not addressed in the course? Is there some content that can be further approached due to the professional practice needs?" The questions were discursive, unlimited space for the answers and the student could spend as long as necessary time to write them.

272 answers were obtained. They were read by the first researcher, transcribed into Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet and analyzed from the nomenclature of the syllabus content or elements that characterized them. After the initial analysis, 61 answers were excluded for not pertaining to the questions' subject, thus the remaining 211 answers constituted the sample of the present study.

A second analysis was obtained, which divided the answers into two major categories: suggestions for syllabus content related to the curriculum courses and other suggestions. The first category was further divided into two subgroups ("Deepening of existing Syllabus Content" and "Introduction of New Content"), from the central thematic categorization of each response. The last analysis was printed and sent to the other two researchers, experts in the course curriculum content and in the Nursing Management area, for validation of groups and suggestions for changes. After consensus, data classification was finished, characterizing the process of investigator triangulation, in which two or more investigators collaborate for data interpretation of discursive questions.<sup>11</sup>

## RESULTS

216 nurses aged between 27 and 57 years participated in the study, with majority (53.4%) ranging between 27 and 32 years of age and being female (89.3%). About 50% of the students graduated in Nursing in state universities and 72% had graduated less than seven years ago.

From the total number of students, 61 (28.2%) mentioned briefly being satisfied with the syllabus content pertaining to the course curriculum, not suggesting the inclusion or further deepening of some content. Two students (0.9%) did not answer the question. The remaining 153 (70.8%) students answered the questions, resulting in 211 responses, and some students responded more than one answer, observing 1.4 citations per student.

The 211 answers originated two groups: one entitled "Deepening of existing Syllabus Content" (Table 1), corresponding to 173 answers (82.0%); and the other, "Introduction of New Content" (Table 2), with 38 (18%) answers. The groups will be presented separately to facilitate the reader's understanding.

Table 1 - Distribution of suggestions from students about the deepening in existence syllabus content for the Nursing Management Distance Learning Mode course - Sao Paulo, 2011

Deepening in Existence Syllabus Content	N	%
Health Information Management	33	19,1
Nursing Management	42	24,3
Assessment in HealthCare	39	22,5
Human Resource Management	32	18,5
Management of Physical and Material Resources	8	4,6
Management of Financial Resources	4	2,3
Introduction to General Management	4	2,3
Marketing in Health	4	2,3
Research Methods	4	2,3
Orientation for monograph delivery	3	1,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Table 2 - Distribution of students' suggestions on introducing new content in the Nursing Management Distance Learning Mode course - Sao Paulo, 2011

Introduction of New Contents	N	%
Primary care/Public Health Management	16	42,1
Systematization of nursing care	6	15,8
Health humanization	3	7,9
Time Management	2	5,3
Approach beyond the hospital field	1	2,6
Co-management	1	2,6
Deepen all subjects	1	2,6
Education in health	1	2,6
Outsourcing of services	1	2,6
Autonomy of nurses	1	2,6
Psychology	1	2,6
Pedagogy	1	2,6
Elaboration of a project	1	2,6
Life Management	1	2,6
Management Practices	1	2,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The first group contemplated the syllabus content existing in the course curriculum, distributed among 10 of the 12 subjects offered. The subjects Learning Environment and Trends in Management were not referred to. In this group the highest number of answers was observed, highlighting the content related to the subjects Health Information Management, Nursing Management, Assessment in HealthCare and Human Resource Management. These content accounts for over 50% of the suggestions in the first group of answers, with percentages that diverge from the others, and, for that reason, this will be better explored in Table 3.

Table 3 - Suggestions for deepening in existence syllabus content more frequently presented by students for the Nursing Management Distance Learning Mode course - Sao Paulo, 2011

Subjects	Syllabus Content	N	%
Nursing Management	Interpersonal Relationship	11	26,2
	Conflict/Negotiation	6	14,3
	Nursing management	6	14,3
	Leadership	5	11,9
	CLT/Legislation	4	9,5
	Communication	4	9,5
	Workers' health	4	9,5
	Competencies	1	2,4
	Planning	1	2,4
	<b>Total</b>		<b>42</b>
Health Information Management	Health information	36	92,3
	Electronic health records	3	7,7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Human Resources Management	Dimensioning	11	34,4
	Human resources management	8	25,0
	Recruitment/selection	5	15,6
	Sectorial scales	4	12,5
	Continuing education	3	9,4
	Team motivation	1	3,1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Assessment in Healthcare	Auditing	15	45,5
	Quality management	9	27,3
	Hospital accreditation	7	21,2
	Risk management	2	6,1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The second group of answers represents suggestions on the Introduction of New Content and presents a lower frequency (18.0%), encompassing unique contents and suggestions that were not part of the course curriculum or were brought briefly in the content some subject. Suggestions for an approach directed towards nurses who work in public services predominated, focusing on primary healthcare, overcoming the hospital prevailing focus.

Some suggestions that go beyond management level are deserve attention, relating to assistance nursing work process, and they are: systematization of nursing care, clinical reasoning and clinical assessment of the patient. The suggestions also contemplated Time Management, quoted briefly in the content of Nursing Management and Health Humanization, in Human Resource Management.

Statements on Management Competencies were prominent in the content related to Nursing Management (n=42), including: interpersonal relationship 26.2% (n=11), trading 14.3% (n=6) and leadership 11.9% (n=5).

In Health Information Management, the students were less specific regarding reference content, because 92.3% (n=36) cited the literal name of the subject and 7.7% (n=3) mentioned electronic health records. From the analysis, by similarity of answers, three key aspects were identified for their choice: lack of understanding the subject during the course (35%), issue update (30%) and necessity felt in practice (35%).

Suggestions of syllabus content that permeate the subject Human Resources Management were represented by: 3.1% (n=1) on team motivation; 9.4% (n=3) on continuing education service, highlighting the specializations; 12.5% (n=4) requested more information about sectoral division sales for the nursing technicians team; 15.6% (n=5) regarding recruitment/selection; 25.0% (n=8) citations of the subject's nomenclature; 34.4% (n=11) on dimensioning the staff, especially reports of understaffing their teams.

Evaluation of HealthCare Services comprehends current content related to recent experiences of the professionals in hos-

pitals. Auditing (45.5%) and, more specifically, Hospital Accreditation (21.2%) were cited. Some students expressed suggestions on teaching strategies for the course. Although this was not the focus of this study, they were grouped as shown in Table 4.

There was a predominance of requests for more exercises based in practical examples, having nine suggestions (47.3%) regarding this issue, and more video classes, represented by five suggestions (26.2%).

Table 4 - Suggestions of teaching strategies for the Nursing Management Distance Learning Mode course, according to students - Sao Paulo, 2011

Suggested teaching strategies	N	%
Exercises with more examples of professional practice	9	47,3
Online classes (video lessons)	5	26,2
Written activities	1	5,3
Practical class	1	5,3
More frequent person meetings	1	5,3
More frequent person meetings	1	5,3
More frequent feedback from professors	1	5,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100,0</b>

## DISCUSSION

The predominance of women in the course meets the Census of the Brazilian Association for Distance Education, published in 2012, which reveals the dominance of this gender in distance courses in the country<sup>2</sup>, besides meeting the historical profile predominantly female in Nursing history.<sup>12</sup>

The choice of content in Nursing Management related to the different functions that nurses have been developing in the health scenario in the country, assuming gradually management positions at different levels of care. However, knowledge inherent to Nursing Management is not fully taught during graduation, either because it continuously renews or it contemplates a range of specific content.

Facing this demand, curriculum guidelines began to devote more hours to this theme. However, the specialization courses are still the ones, which engage in the development and effective qualification of nurses in management, since the formation of a generalist nurse is focused on the development of knowledge, with equity, of the four work process: assisting, searching, managing and teaching. But, this formation does not cover the real demands of the market.<sup>13</sup>

It is possible to infer that CEGEMD enables students, with different backgrounds, the access to management knowledge, specific to the nursing area and supported by the seal of UNIFESP, thus adding subsidies to operate at different levels of management.

The suggestions covering Nursing Management comprise diverse management competences and draw attention by the high-

er frequency of citations. The competences imply the enhancement of the professionals' performance, increasing the use of individual and collective capacities to add economic value to organizations and social value to individuals, achieving the societal transformations and demands of the competitive job market.<sup>14</sup>

This concern is evident in Nursing, in agreement with the suggestions of students, as attested by the various initiatives of educational institutions and even regulatory agencies, such as the "Competencies Project" (developed by the Regional Nursing Council of Sao Paulo). And it is clear that the deeper approach of these contents assists in the daily practice of nurses.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is possible to consider that the greater workload or adequacy of the teaching strategy should be undertaken to explore this theme.

According to the students' answers, it is necessary to revise the course, considering workload, teaching strategy and courseware. The suggestions are relevant, given the fact that the changes meet the rapid progress of science and technology and necessity of adaptation and transformation of professionals, to fulfill the demands of emerging healthcare.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it is observed, today, the growing demand for multitasking professionals.

It is also notable the number of nurses who work in public health, where the challenge of working with computerized system is prominent, as the Health Information System.

This fact creates a search for specific content in this area. Computerized systems allow visualization of management, epidemiological and clinical information available in databases and, thus, help in the management of health services and programs, particularly in planning.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the ability to use these systems becomes a major requirement for these professionals.

The evaluated suggestions reveal the importance of exploring content inherent to Human Source Management. Since this theme involves daily activities of the nurses of different segments, it increases the interest and concern of the professionals. It is possible that a greater number of support materials (books, texts, articles) on the subject will be available in the future in the course, in response to this demand, providing more subsidies to those interested.

Assessment in HealthCare was also remembered by the students, appropriately merging their suggestions, without exhausting the theme, because it is a wide area with the need of a specific curriculum to graduate. However, further discussions on the subject could be introduced in the course, since the institutions have sought to evaluate their service systems.

Predominated suggestions for an approach directed to nurses that act in public services, focusing on primary healthcare, outperforming the prevailing focus on hospitals. These suggestions are relevant and amenable to inclusion in the course, since they reflect market demand and the healthcare scenario in the country, where it is estimated that 75% of the population are users of the Unified Health System (SUS).<sup>18</sup>

The large continent of users who depend on SUS implies the increased absorption of professionals to act in this segment and strong investment in health promotion and disease prevention. This fact turns primary health care into a priority for the Ministry of Health. The insertion of nurses is remarkable, especially in the Family HealthCare Strategy, a program with significant expansion in the country over the last decade and attributed a range of management functions to the nurse.<sup>19</sup>

A study conducted with nurses in leadership positions of public services highlights the importance of prioritizing the development of specific management skills for a performance of excellence in primary health care through a background based on scientific evidence.<sup>20</sup>

The suggestions related to Research Methods cite the construction of the final paper, inferring the students' difficulty. Contact with research methodologies occurs during undergraduate course concurrently with the preparation of the final paper, scientific research, extension projects and other allied projects. Therefore, it was expected to have more prepared students for development of the work than was actually observed by the advisers. This finding reflects the nurses' comprehension about the indispensability of the production of scientific knowledge as main vehicle for purchasing, production and deepening of knowledge,<sup>21</sup> and suggests that the practice in research is not an aspect of these professionals' daily life.

We highlight suggestions that go beyond the management level, as the ones related to the assistance work process. This content does not constitute the central theme of the course, which prevents the insertion of those in upcoming editions.

The students also contemplated Time Management, which was briefly mentioned during exposure of the contents of Nursing Management and Health Humanization, in the subject Human Resource Management.

The students required more practice exercises, as case studies or challenges. This request can be met through better usage of DLE tools belonging to Moodle, as chats and forums, already used in the course, in which extensive discussions on the practice and even surveys may occur. These methods can lead students to critically reflect in the performance practice and assimilate scientific-technical content.

Still, when considering that learning is not a process experienced by everyone in the same way, it was suggested to increase of video classes, understood by students as a facilitator of learning. Although there are different learning styles, it is inferred that the majority of students assimilate preferentially verbal information and present more difficulty in reading comprehension of texts.<sup>22</sup>

Interaction between professors and students is necessary and occurs in DLE. The perception of physical distance between these actors may have contributed to the dissatisfac-

tion of the student. Living with traditional teaching requires caution in the transition of models. The effective presence of the professor encourages student participation, contributing to the teaching-learning process. The student needs an "effective communication and feedback, interactivity and sense of communication, appropriate direction and training to perform required tasks", considered good practice within DLE.<sup>4</sup>

The second edition of the course established a prospect of contact between professor and student broader and more intimate, with increased access time and availability of professors in the virtual platform, reduction of the stipulated interval for feedback to students, in order to establish an effective link, more interactivity and, consequently, more satisfaction of the involved parties.

## CONCLUSION

The findings allowed identifying the real needs inherent to nurses' professional practice in Nursing Management. The different contexts of activity in the Brazilian regions where the students were inserted reflect the demands of the national scenario and provide subsidies for the education and training of these professionals.

The suggestions brought by the students permeated various contents. Predominated those related to the subjects Nursing Management, Health Information Management, Assessment in HealthCare and Human Resources Management. In an incipiently form, it was suggested new content, however, the ones of assistance nature were highlighted, inconsistent with the core course proposal, and request for more focus on the content-oriented approach to primary healthcare.

The results were considered in the review of the educational-learning course design, extrapolating the syllabus content and going to teaching strategies, through the enhancement and implementation of active student participation is this process. These findings were considered in improving the second edition of the course in 2011.

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