



Editorial

The challenge of research in occupational health nursing: the elephant in the room?

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Research is an inherent fact to every professional that allows not only reflection on the daily reality where they work, but also provides knowledge for its subsequent application. In this context, nursing research is defined as a scientific process that validates and improves the existing knowledge and generates new information that influences professional practice (1). From this perspective, once incorporated and recognized as a university discipline, nursing competencies have evolved into a position that provoke an exercise of the profession with full technical and scientific autonomy. However, this professional practice is subject to the limitations of the principles and values included in the legal and deontological system, basing the criteria for action on access to the necessary means and the best available scientific evidence. In a complementary way, professional practice must be based on two pillars: guidelines and protocols for clinical and care practice. Therefore, aiming to achieve efficiency and good work in research, the principles of interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary applicable to occupational health professional teams must constitute a maxim (2).

In the first study carried out in the European Union that analyzes the opinion and perception of occupational health nurses about their own competences, teaching and research constitute the least developed field. In fact, in the activity that invites us to propose and intervene in research projects aimed at improving professional activity, there is a clear oscillation between the importance assigned and its execution (3). Occupational health nursing specialists attribute this reality to several reasons: absence of time during the working day, professional isolation, limited academic training and experience in this field (4), low

consumption of scientific literature (5), lack of role integration researcher in daily practice (6), the lack of knowledge of research groups and the low number of doctors in this area of knowledge (7). All of those aspects generate insecurity in a potential approach to a project and that favor distancing from the initiative.

In the context of organizations, the presence of occupational health nursing plays a key role in identifying the needs of the working population, an issue closely linked to the development of research projects and the improvement of the quality of life at work. Among the priority lines of research related to occupational health, professionals express preferences that focus on the following areas: analysing the effects of technological applications and new ways of work, estimating the socioeconomic impact and the cost/benefit ratio of the initiatives established, assessing the consequences of exposure to psychosocial risks, identifying occupational diseases related to the activity and the adaptation of workers with limitations. They also show interest in occupational reinsertion after a prolonged absence, the presence of vulnerable or especially sensitive workers, the incorporation of migrants into companies, the prolongation of working life in healthy conditions and cancer related to professional activity. Once these preferences have been analysed, they show consistency with the proposals of the National Occupational Research Agenda of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) (8). However, less interest appears in the following areas: musculoskeletal disorders, health promotion at work, management of absenteeism and presenteeism related to illness and gender aspects in the context of occupational risk prevention (9, 10). Even so, in this scenario caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, new approaches identified by the Federation of Occupational Health Nurses within the European Union (FOHNEU), made their debut: the impact of this situation on the role of occupational nursing, the access of the working population to the portfolio of services it provides, the level of autonomy in the development of their professional role, the relationship with other members of the occupational risk prevention service, stressful situations caused by the pandemic and the approach to long COVID syndrome in organizations.

This in-depth approach to these professional concerns and needs makes it possible to value the benefits of research. In this way, the development of a research activity generates scientific evidence that influences decision-making and contributes to better care,

encourages a critical look at the observation of reality, stimulates an approach to ask research questions, allows seeking possible solutions to problems and provokes reflective thinking about our behaviour. It also helps to be more rigorous and rational and also stimulates working in groups, increasing sociability and the relationship between professionals.

In this process of research and innovation in health, the training and learning effort in the various stages of the research process are crucial, and among other aspects it includes the following: generating an idea, carrying out an adequate design, having a methodology, searching and capturing a source of funding and considering ethical responsibilities. In addition, in order to develop this type of initiative it is necessary to deepen the leadership capacities.

The exposed approaches are in line with the ideology of the World Health Organization: *nursing should investigate to help the population achieve healthy lifestyles and adequate care*. From this premise, it corresponds to the health professions to actively participate in projects that can benefit the health and wellbeing of people in situations of health and disease, especially in the field of disease prevention, health education, research and exchange of information with health authorities and other professionals (1). Undoubtedly, considering this reality, the full development of the competencies of the teaching and research area within the training program of this specialty takes more value (11), an issue that constitutes a challenge for current and future specialists in occupational health nursing.

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