

Reflections on science in gerontological nursing: possibilities for its path

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Scientific knowledge in Brazilian gerontological nursing has its beginnings more than 50 years ago, specifically in the mid-1970s, in line with the worldwide movement to recognize the complexity of population aging and its challenges in the social, cultural, political and public health spheres. Since then, scientific production in this field has been related to the expansion of *Stricto Sensu* Graduate Programs, national legislation and international guidelines, denoting its growth and scientific maturity.

Following this trend, important scientific communication vehicles have published the knowledge produced about gerontological nursing in the country. Among them, a bibliometric study on scientific production about older adults in the *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* (REBEn – Brazilian Journal of Nursing) identified, between 2000 and 2006, the predominance of qualitative investigations, conducted in the hospital setting, highlighting the participation of *Stricto Sensu* Graduate Programs. It was also observed, in this time frame, the need to invest in research related to the nursing care process, from the perspective of health promotion and improvement of older adults' quality of life⁽¹⁾.

Worldwide, another bibliometric study, carried out from 1900 to 2020, in the Web of Science database, identified 4,923 articles on the subject of gerontological nursing. The United States was the country with the highest scientific production (37.8%), followed by Canada (6.2%) and Australia (5.9%). In this ranking, Brazil occupied the tenth position (3.2%), being the first in Latin America. The most frequent themes were depression, malnutrition, education, Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Trends in more current research topics were also observed, such as COVID-19, locomotor syndrome, interprofessional practice, emergency nursing and public health⁽²⁾. Still, in relation to this worldwide survey, an exponential growth in the number of publications was identified from 1990, with a maximum peak in 2018. The researchers compared the citation indicators of these articles with other bibliometric studies and found that scientific production in the area has been considered of interest to readers, however the citation rate has decreased in the last ten years⁽²⁾.

Thus, when we observe the bibliometric indicators, the current production evidences the advance of scientific knowledge in gerontological nursing in recent decades. However, it is worth reflecting on the quality of the methodological approaches of the research produced in this field and, in the same way, if the themes are aligned with older adults' health needs, nursing practices and professional training. Based on these reflections, we highlight two international documents that contribute to this discussion.

The Pan American Health Organization conducted a study to define nursing research priorities for the Regions of the Americas, guided by the concepts of universal access to health and universal health coverage. As a result of this work, six categories were listed, namely: 1) policies and education of human resources in nursing; 2) structure, organization and dynamics of health systems and services; 3) science, technology, innovation and public health information systems; 4) financing of health systems and services; 5) health policies, governance and social control; and 6) social studies in health⁽³⁾.

In December 2020, the United Nations General Assembly established the global plan for the Decade of Healthy Aging (2021-2030). This initiative was based on previous guidelines, such as the goals of the Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2030, whose main objective is to achieve and support actions to build a society for all ages. To this end, four areas of action were defined: 1) change the way we think, feel and act in relation to age and aging; 2) ensuring that communities promote the capabilities of older people; 3) deliver person-centered and appropriate integrated care and Primary Health Care services for older adults; 4) provide access to long-term care for older adults who need it⁽⁴⁾.

Considering the international documents, the specificities in elder health and the potential of the science of gerontological

nursing in direct care, management, teaching and scientific production, we highlighted some reflections. Are researches based on gerontological nursing care addressing the different dimensions of the process of senescence and senility? Do studies have the potential to answer gaps that support the profession in empowering older adults and nursing professionals? Are innovative methods for gerontological care researched? Are information technology resources being used for gerontological nursing care? How are nursing professionals being prepared to care for this population? These questions and others, which can be aggregated, help us to collectively discuss the paths we should follow for safe and qualified nursing care for older adults.

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