

**From Portugal to the world***De Portugal al mundo**De Portugal para o mundo*

The International Year of Nurses ended just under a month ago. It is still ironic that it be so. In fact, 2020 will go down in history forever as those twelve months when everything changed radically. Everything has changed: our way of being, thinking, feeling, and relating to each other.

The world knows better today, largely because of the pandemic that made our lives tremble, the energy of nurses. It is to all of them that we owe care to millions and millions of lives threatened by an unknown enemy. It is like that from Portugal to Brazil. From India to the United States. From Russia to China. The mission is still far from complete. It is necessary to maintain the courage, focus and professionalism recognized in the many corners of this planet.

We have now started a new phase: vaccination. The discovery of the vaccine against COVID-19 is a light of hope in our lives and nurses, faithful to their sense of caregivers, are the bearers of that confidence in the future. They are the ones who now illuminate the path of darkness where we are still living. They are the messengers of love. Yes, vaccinating is an act of love.

Let me tell you the Portuguese story. We are one of the countries with one of the highest rates of vaccination coverage in the world and this is due in large part to the work done by nurses. The National Vaccination Program was created in 1965 with the support of the World Health Organization. It is free and accessible to all citizens. In this process, nurses assume a central role. They are the ones who are at the forefront of awareness of the importance of the vaccine and continue to monitor it throughout their lives. The Portuguese trust vaccination also because they trust nurses.

The European Commission's figures leave no room for doubt, more than 95% of Portuguese people believe in the safety, effectiveness, and importance of vaccines under the National Vaccination Program. Here you can see the relevance of the role of Portuguese nurses in this process.

I wanted to tell this story so that they can get to know a little about the Portuguese reality. We are a country with a National Health Service (SNS) that functions as one of the pillars of democracy, with universal access and tending free of charge. The truth is that in recent years, and largely because of the failure of the successive governments to bet, this pillar has been weakened. Lack of investment and courage. One of the main problems has been the lack of appreciation of nurses. Wages are low and working conditions are difficult. This is the urgency of the moment in Portugal.

**Ana Rita Cavaco<sup>1</sup>**

ORCID: 0000-0002-7256-3457

<sup>1</sup>Ordem dos Enfermeiros. Lisbon, Portugal.**How to cite this article:**

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Ana Rita Cavaco

E-mail:

[gabinete.bastonaria@ordemenfermeiros.pt](mailto:gabinete.bastonaria@ordemenfermeiros.pt)

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On the other hand, when I look at the reality experienced in many countries during this pandemic, I reinforce my pride in our idea of a National Health Service that does not exclude anyone, or at least it should not. It is a real dream that we cannot let go. It is a dream that the world must analyze and, in certain cases, try to replicate, in the name of this fundamental human right: health, barrier-free access to health care.

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