

**The work process of gerontology nurses: an integrative literature review***El proceso de trabajo de las enfermeras de gerontología: una revisión integradora de la literatura**O processo de trabalho do enfermeiro gerontólogo: uma revisão integrativa de literatura***Pedro Paulo Corrêa Santana<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

The aim was to analyze the national and international scientific production on the work process of gerontologist nurses. This is an exploratory and descriptive study, based on an integrative literature review, where the six steps inherent to this method were applied. The data survey was carried out in May 2021 in the Scientific Electronic Library Online library and in the databases of Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences and Nursing Data Library in the Virtual Health Library from the association of descriptors. The search found 13 articles selected for this review. It was evidenced that there is a deficit of nurses specialized in gerontology, which weakens the work of nurses and the quality of care for the elderly and their families. Therefore, nurses need to be trained in safe health practices in elderly care, as the peculiarities inherent to aging cannot be discarded in the care process.

**Descriptors:** Patient-Centered Care; Geriatrics; Management of Professional Practice; Working Environment; Nurses Improving Care for Health System Elders.

**Resumen**

El objetivo fue analizar la producción científica nacional e internacional sobre el proceso de trabajo del enfermero gerontólogo. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio y descriptivo, basado en una revisión integradora de la literatura, donde se aplicaron los seis pasos inherentes a este método. La encuesta de datos se realizó en mayo de 2021 en la biblioteca en línea de la Biblioteca Científica Electrónica y en las bases de datos de Literatura Latinoamericana y Caribeña en Ciencias de la Salud y Biblioteca de Datos de Enfermería en la Biblioteca Virtual en Salud de la asociación de descriptores. La búsqueda encontró 13 artículos seleccionados para esta revisión. Se evidenció que existe un déficit de enfermeras especializadas en gerontología, lo que debilita la labor de las enfermeras y la calidad de la atención al anciano y sus familias. Por tanto, es necesario capacitar al enfermero en prácticas seguras de salud en el cuidado de los ancianos, ya que las peculiaridades inherentes al envejecimiento no pueden descartarse en el proceso de cuidado.

**Descriptoros:** Atención Centrada en el Paciente; Geriátrica; Gestión de la Práctica Profesional; Ambiente de Trabajo; Enfermeras que Mejoran la Atención a los Ancianos del Sistema de Salud.

**Resumo**

Objetivou-se analisar a produção científica nacional e internacional sobre o processo de trabalho do enfermeiro gerontólogo. Trata-se de um estudo exploratório e descritivo, sedimentado em revisão integrativa de literatura, onde foram aplicadas as seis etapas inerentes a este método. O levantamento de dados foi realizado em maio de 2021 na biblioteca da *Scientific Electronic Library Online* e nas bases de dados da Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde e Biblioteca de Dados de Enfermagem na Biblioteca Virtual de Saúde a partir da associação dos descritores. Foram encontrados na busca 13 artigos selecionados para esta revisão. Foi evidenciado que há um déficit de enfermeiros especializados em gerontologia, o que fragiliza o trabalho do enfermeiro e a qualidade do atendimento ao idoso e a sua família. Portanto, o enfermeiro precisa estar capacitado em práticas seguras de saúde no atendimento ao idoso, pois as particularidades inerentes ao envelhecimento não podem ser descartadas no processo de cuidado.

**Descritores:** Assistência Centrada no Paciente; Geriatria; Gerenciamento da Prática Profissional; Ambiente de Trabalho; Cuidado de Enfermagem ao Idoso Hospitalizado.



## Introduction

The work of Nursing has been constantly improved, making use of its mission, which is to take care of physical, mental, and social well-being, prevent situations of illness and injuries and act in the rehabilitation of people. Since the 19th century, Florence Nightingale, a pioneer in Nursing, along with other nurses, has been building theories that strengthen nursing as a care profession<sup>1</sup>.

The set of this knowledge allowed the nurse to develop a specialized look in different areas, directing their work and serving individuals in a qualified and comprehensive way<sup>2</sup>. According to a study<sup>3</sup>, in Brazil, specializations in nursing began in the 1970s, with constant growth and demand over the next few decades.

The phenomenon of population aging in Brazil is evident, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, between 1940 and 2015, the life expectancy of Brazilians increased by about 30 years, leaping from 45 to an average of 75 years. With this, primary care services aimed at the elderly population should be expanded, giving due assistance to problems that permeate the aging process, such as the incidence of non-communicable chronic diseases<sup>4</sup>.

According to the Ministry of Health's national agenda of health research priorities, conducting research on the health of the elderly has been relevant and has been placed as a priority, highlighting points in the epidemiological profile of dementias and risk factors, and the evaluation of the impact of health education practices in the elderly.

Gerontological Nursing works in the process of specialized care, with the nurse being a professional capable of meeting, understanding, and acting on the needs of the elderly. To proceed with the care of the elderly, it is necessary to know the areas of nursing practice along with

This study is justified by encouraging the study of gerontology in undergraduate and graduate nursing courses to increase the demand for professionals specialized in caring for the elderly, as they need a comprehensive and individualized look to meet the needs of a whole. of the population that is living longer and longer<sup>6</sup>.

It is also important to emphasize the nursing actions regarding care and communication with the elderly, with the professional nurse having the responsibility to offer the appropriate approach to the care demands presented by the elderly<sup>7</sup>.

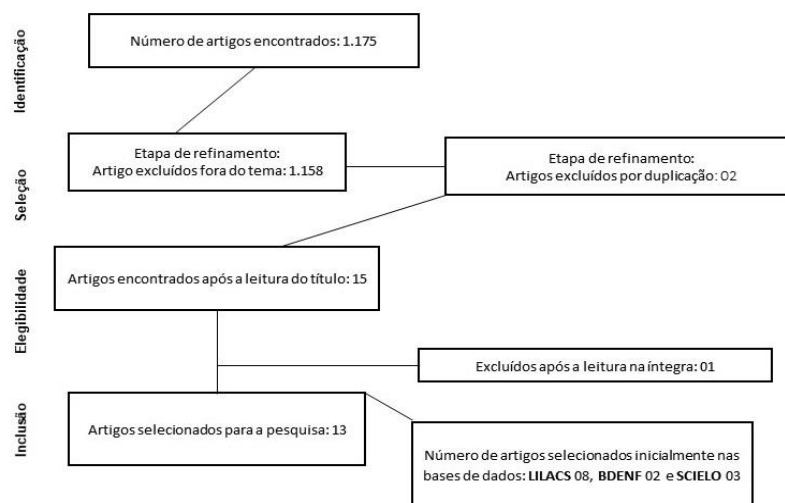
This study contributes to nursing in awakening the search for specialties for those who already work with the elderly. Rethinking the curricula of institutions that train professional nurses and the broad gerontological assessment so that care is adequate to the needs of the elderly and their families.

How is the work process of gerontology nurses constituted as a guiding question for the study? Thus, the objective was to analyze the work process of gerontology nurses based on national scientific nursing production.

## Methodology

This study is an integrative literature review, exploratory and descriptive. This research method enabled the search, critical assessment, and synthesis of available evidence on the subject. For the integrative literature review to be carried out, the researcher must follow the six steps inherent to this method<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 1. Flowchart of the selection process for researched articles. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2017



In the first stage, the research topic was chosen and the question that guided the integrative review was delimited. In this study, how the work process of gerontology nurses was defined as a research question?

In the second stage, there was the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria for the identified studies and the search in the literature itself. After choosing the topic, the following inclusion criteria were considered: articles



published in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, with the descriptions Nursing; Gerontology; Professional Practice; Work; Geriatric Nursing. The fourteen-year time frame from 2006 to 2020. As exclusion criteria, it was decided to eliminate articles that were not in accordance with the objective of the study and those that were duplicated, that is, identified in more than one database. These were counted as just one. Theses and dissertations were also eliminated.

It is noteworthy that the data survey was carried out in May 2021. The data on the subject were collected in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and in the Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), and the Nursing Database (BDENF). The search for published articles was carried out by associating the descriptors in pairs and trios, as suggested by the Health Sciences Descriptors Portal, using the Boolean “AND” operator and its corresponding counterparts in English and Spanish.

In the third stage, studies were categorized. This step aims to organize and summarize the information in a concise way, forming an easily accessible database. To organize the studies, a table will be created in Microsoft Excel® 2016 software with the variables year of publication, database, journal, article title and main results.

In the fourth stage, the evaluation of the studies included in the integrative review was carried out. The studies were critically analyzed so that it was possible to explain similar or conflicting results between them. In the fifth stage, the interpretation of the results was performed. At this stage, the discussion of the research results takes place, which requires the comparison of studies carried out with theoretical knowledge.

In the sixth and final stage, the review and synthesis of knowledge was presented. This step consists of preparing the document that must contain the steps taken by the reviewer to achieve the results. It is noteworthy that the fifth and sixth steps were completed along the textual body. The discussion took place from the interpretation and synthesis of the results evidenced from the selected articles and the presentation of the integrative review was clear and complete, allowing the reader to critically evaluate the results.

### Results

To start data analysis, an analytical framework was built with information extracted from selected studies with year of publication, database, journal, article title and main results in Chart 1.

**Chart 1.** Summary of the main results found according to year of publication, database, journal, article title and main results. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2017

Year and database	Journal	Article title	Main results
2005. LILACS	Revista Latino – Americana em Enfermagem	O Enfermeiro como instrumento de ação no cuidar do idoso	Nurse's role in caring for the elderly's basic needs, communicative interaction, and the nurse as the main figure in elderly care.
2007. SciELO	Revista Latino – Americana em Enfermagem	Familiares visitantes e acompanhantes de adultos e idosos hospitalizados: análise da experiência na perspectiva do processo de trabalho em Enfermagem	Educate the companion in caring for the elderly in a hospital environment. The reception of the companion by the nursing team. Establishment of norms so as not to generate conflicts in the roles of caregivers in the nursing team.
2008. SciELO	Acta Paulista de Enfermagem	Promoção da saúde da pessoa idosa: compromisso da enfermagem geronto-geriátrica	The need for nurses' thinking to make the care of the elderly a priority. Understand and increase research on the physiological process of aging and understand the National Policy for the Elderly, emphasizing the role of the SUS. Acting in self-care and improving the perspective of life.
2008. LILACS	Cogitare Enfermagem	Percepção de acadêmicos de Enfermagem sobre o cuidar de idosos	Lack of in-depth care for the elderly during professional training, causing the insufficiency of professional training. Deficiency of critical-scientific vision for the creation of specific care for the elderly.
2010. LILACS	Ciência e Cuidado em Saúde	Diagnósticos de Enfermagem prevalentes em geriatria segundo grau de dependência	Most of the elderly are female, whose most prevalent diseases are Systemic Arterial Hypertension, increasing the incidence of stroke and osteoarticular diseases and a portion need help to perform activities, self-care deficit.
2011. LILACS	Revista Kairós Gerontologia	A importância da família participante para acompanhantes de idosos hospitalizados: a atuação do enfermeiro.	The family has a fundamental role in caring for the elderly. Women (wives and daughters) are the majority in the provision of care, but the preparation / training of caregivers to provide adequate and humanized care to the elderly is still precarious.
2012. LILACS	Revista Escola de Enfermagem USP	Reconhecimento dos aspectos tacéticos para o cuidado efetivo e de qualidade ao idoso hospitalizado	The nurse's perception when touching the elderly, respecting their pain intensity, place of pain, touching the elderly using communication and sensitivity.



2012. LILACS	Online Brazilian Journal of Nursing	Acción intencional de la enseñanza para la consulta de enfermería: estudio fenomenológico	The relevance of the knowledge acquired during graduation, the creation of a nursing consultation aimed at the elderly and the development of professionals' skills for better service provision to the elderly.
2013. LILACS	Revista Gaúcha de Enfermagem	Enfermagem gerontológica: a produção do conhecimento na profissão (1970 – 1996).	Difficulty in collecting data, lack of experts on human aging, resistance to the inclusion of the subject in universities, being found most of the time only in postgraduate courses and the lack of experience and practice on the part of professionals.
2013 - BDEF	Congresso Internacional de Envelhecimento Humano	Consulta de Enfermagem para o idoso: revisão bibliográfica	The nursing consultation focused on primary health care for the elderly. Encourage the study of new technologies to improve the care provided by the nursing team.
2015 - SciELO	Revista Gaúcha de Enfermagem	Acolhimento com classificação de risco em serviço de emergência na perspectiva do idoso	Act in the shortest time possible to care for elderly people in serious condition. Complaints from elderly people with minor problems regarding the waiting time for care. Organize service sectors and train employees on procedures guidance.
2016 - LILACS	Medicina (Ribeirão Preto)	Avaliação de estrutura e processo na atenção em Diabetes mellitus	The care environment is appropriate; however, professionals do not record important patient information such as height and BMI, not giving adequate importance to the data of patients with Diabetes.
2019 BDEF	Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem	O Mercado de trabalho em enfermagem gerontológica no Brasil	Transformation of elderly care practices in the period described, considering the inexistence of a specific job market; need for theoretical knowledge for assistance in Gerontology; the scarcity of researches and researchers in the area; the emergence of caregivers for the elderly; the construction of multidisciplinary and the transformation of long-term institutions.

**Discussion**

The importance of epidemiological knowledge is highlighted, as it will promote the science of factors that will influence health and diseases that have higher incidences in certain regions, supporting good health practices to prevent these risks and health problems in the elderly population<sup>3,4,9</sup>.

Due to their lifestyle and the aging process itself, the elderly can be affected by diseases prevalent in this age group, such as Diabetes Mellitus type II, which according to the World Health Organization, Brazil, by the year 2030, may become the 6th country in the world in prevalence. Systemic arterial hypertension is highlighted and deserves all the attention of nurses in the educational process for self-care, as it puts the elderly at risk of a cerebrovascular accident (CVA) which can bring sequelae, leading to partial or total dependence on third-party care for the development of activities of daily living<sup>10,11</sup>.

The development of Gerontological Nursing was directly related to the demographic and epidemiological transition process in Brazil, which resulted in an increase in the elderly population in the country and, consequently, in a growing demand for this clientele in health services, with a great advance based on the increase of the aging index in Brazil<sup>12</sup>.

In the work process of a gerontologist nurse, one cannot forget the companions, who are mostly made up of family members, most of whom are female, made up of wives or daughters, and often do not have training to engage the care for the elderly who have some type of dependency. Another factor that was highlighted is that many of the

caregivers are spouses, causing an elderly person to take care of another elderly person who also needs specific care. However, when we bring it to the field of hospitalization, the authors highlighted the difficulty of caregivers, often, to respect institutional norms, going over the health team<sup>13,14</sup>.

Nurses need to work on health education with the elderly and especially with caregivers, as they are the ones who spend most of their time with them, so that they better understand how to intervene in the care demands of these elderly people, including respecting medical prescriptions and of nursing, contributing to the promotion of self-care, making use of its role in the rehabilitation of the elderly (recovery, comfort and safety), minimizing the feeling of incapacity of the public in question<sup>15,16</sup>.

Self-care is a theory of nursing developed by Dorothea Orem in which the individual will carry out activities, according to his/her capacity, in favor of health maintenance. Bringing it to the reality of the elderly, it is important that nurses encourage any type of activity for the elderly to perform, such as: eating alone, performing personal hygiene, educational activities such as interactive games, crosswords, among others<sup>16,17</sup>.

Many elderly people complain about the way they are welcomed in the hospital environment, not having their companions full time and the waiting time for care<sup>3,15</sup>. The gerontological nurse needs to be aware of laws, such as number 8.842/94, which ensure rights such as autonomy and the right to health at any level of care. Accordingly, the Elderly Statute in accordance with Law No. 10.741/03, where



it says that it is the State's obligation to guarantee the protection and health of people over 60 years of age.

Nurses must guide their work process in humanization, so that there is individualized, comprehensive and precise care, as they are the ones who will provide comfort and safety by communicating all the necessary care, with accessible and easy-to-understand language, respecting the changes arising from the aging process, encouraging self-care and psychological well-being<sup>15,16,18</sup>.

It was observed, in the studies, the deficiency of disciplines focused on the health of the elderly, whose discussion is emerging, for the purposes of knowledge of the aging process in their respective domains, since graduation, aiming at a breadth of technical and scientific knowledge<sup>19,20</sup>. The development of critical thinking to search for new perspectives in relation to the elderly should not only be emphasized in graduate studies, as nurses have a great difficulty in attending to this public, performing a deficient nursing consultation, compromising the quality of the assistance<sup>4,9</sup>.

For those professionals who already work in hospital or home care, it is extremely important to update their knowledge. It is important that the work institution offers its professionals the chance to increase their scientific knowledge to improve the care practice of patients, as many professionals are already working in elderly care and have not had the opportunity to deepen their reading of the particularities of this population group<sup>21,22</sup>.

## Conclusion

The gerontological nurse needs extensive knowledge to provide quality care to the elderly population. In his construction as a professional, he must master

epidemiology, mainly covering the chronic non-communicable diseases that most affect the elderly, such as SAH and Type II Diabetes mellitus, domain of laws that guarantee the rights of the elderly and the understanding of the aging process and how it influences the individual's daily activities.

Another important attribution of the professional nurse is to understand the elderly person's family or companion, showing them how to welcome and meet the needs of the new phase. In the hospital context, rehabilitation can take a long time, but with humanized and targeted care, treatment can become faster, more efficient, and less invasive, and one of the ways this happens is to bring the family or companion to assist in this recovery process. It is worth encouraging self-care, showing both the elderly and the family that they are not disabled and can perform various activities, such as sports, cooking, dancing, among others, according to the limits of their bodies.

The work process of the gerontologist nurse is in conjunction with the elderly, family, and multidisciplinary team. The conduct of how this set is managed will determine a good nursing care and offer well-being to the elderly.

Finally, for this entire process to become efficient, professionals need to have a theoretical-scientific knowledge base, which should take place since graduation. There are few universities that offer a discipline focused on the health of the elderly, and this makes the professional leave without the skills to serve the elderly as soon as they graduate, forcing them to look for a specialization to serve this public. In addition to the need to implement a specific discipline at graduation, there needs to be continued education in the work environment, so that nurses always have access to new technologies that can improve their care.

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