

Nursing care for individuals with autism spectrum disorder: an experience report from an event of the technical chamber on accessibility and rehabilitation nursing

Atención de enfermería a personas con trastorno del espectro autista: informe de experiencia de un evento de la cámara técnica sobre accesibilidad y enfermería de rehabilitación

Assistência de enfermagem à pessoa com transtorno do espectro autista: relato de experiência de um evento da câmara técnica de acessibilidade e enfermagem de reabilitação

Carla Oliveira Shubert^{1*}

ORCID: 0000-0002-3406-3160

Tiago Meirelles Lourenço

Ragauskas²

ORCID: 0009-0006-1749-6534

Antonio da Silva Ribeiro³

ORCID: 0000-0003-1888-1099

Wiliam César Alves Machado⁴

ORCID: 0000-0002-4325-7143

Vanessa Vianna Cruz⁴

ORCID: 0000-0003-3564-0457

Lucia Helena Garcia Penna²

ORCID: 0000-0001-9227-628X

Fernanda Henriques da Silva⁵

ORCID: 0000-0002-0519-9480

Amanda Sarkis Moor Santos

Xavier⁶

ORCID: 0000-0001-7899-1033

Livia Fajin de Mello²

ORCID: 0000-0002-5613-7976

¹Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

²Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

³Centro Universitário Maurício de Nassau. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

⁴Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

⁵Policlínica Piquet Carneiro da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

⁶Universidade Vértix. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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***Corresponding author:**

carlashubert@yahoo.com.br

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Abstract

This report describes the experience of the Accessibility and Rehabilitation Nursing Technical Chamber of the Regional Nursing Council of Rio de Janeiro (Coren-RJ) in holding, for the second consecutive year, an event focused on discussing nursing care for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The meeting, held in April, was attended by 157 nursing professionals and students and addressed topics such as family support, nursing consultations, diagnostic tests, and communication strategies with non-verbal individuals. The experience highlighted and reinforced the importance of continuing education, accessible communication, and person-centered care as fundamental principles for achieving comprehensive care in rehabilitation nursing. The event consolidated itself as a space for collective learning, strengthening the ethical and social commitment of the profession to inclusion and the humanization of care.

Descriptors: Nursing; Social Inclusion; People with Disabilities; Autism Spectrum Disorder; Nursing Education.

Resumén

Este informe describe la experiencia de la Cámara Técnica de Accesibilidad y Enfermería de Rehabilitación del Consejo Regional de Enfermería de Río de Janeiro (Coren-RJ) al organizar, por segundo año consecutivo, un evento centrado en la atención de enfermería a personas con Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA). La reunión, celebrada en abril, contó con la participación de 157 profesionales y estudiantes de enfermería y abordó temas como el apoyo familiar, las consultas de enfermería, las pruebas diagnósticas y las estrategias de comunicación con personas no verbales. La experiencia puso de relieve y reforzó la importancia de la formación continua, la comunicación accesible y la atención centrada en la persona como principios fundamentales para lograr una atención integral en enfermería de rehabilitación. El evento se consolidó como un espacio de aprendizaje colectivo, fortaleciendo el compromiso ético y social de la profesión con la inclusión y la humanización de los cuidados.

Descriptoros: Enfermería; Inclusión Social; Personas con Discapacidad; Trastorno del Espectro Autista; Educación en Enfermería.

Resumo

O presente relato descreve a experiência da Câmara Técnica de Acessibilidade e Enfermagem de Reabilitação do Conselho Regional de Enfermagem do Rio de Janeiro (Coren-RJ) na realização, pelo segundo ano consecutivo, de um evento voltado à discussão da assistência de enfermagem à pessoa com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA). O encontro, realizado em abril, contou com a participação de 157 profissionais e estudantes de enfermagem e abordou temas como o apoio à família, a consulta de enfermagem, os testes diagnósticos e as estratégias de comunicação com pessoas não verbais. A experiência evidenciou e reforça a importância da formação continuada, da comunicação acessível e do cuidado centrado na pessoa, como princípios fundamentais ao alcance da integralidade na atuação da enfermagem de reabilitação. O evento consolidou-se como espaço de aprendizagem coletiva, fortalecendo o compromisso ético e social da categoria com a inclusão e a humanização do cuidado.

Descriptoros: Enfermagem; Inclusão Social; Pessoas com Deficiência; Transtorno do Espectro Autista; Educação em Enfermagem.



Introduction

Nursing care for individuals with disabilities and those with specific conditions that impact neuropsychomotor development, supported by Cofen Resolution No. 728 of November 9, 2023, which regulates the actions of Rehabilitation Nursing teams, requires sensitivity, technical preparation, and an understanding of the unique aspects that permeate the health-disease process. In this context, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has gained prominence in discussions about inclusive health, especially because it demands specific strategies for welcoming, communication, and intervention¹⁻⁴.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5), ASD is characterized by persistent deficits in communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. These symptoms must be present from early development, although they may only become fully evident when social demands exceed individual capabilities⁵.

Nursing plays a fundamental role in the early identification of signs of autism spectrum disorder, in supporting families, and in developing individualized care plans that respect the sensory, cognitive, and emotional particularities of each person. These actions require skilled listening, empathy, and the use of relational technologies that promote communication and the autonomy of the person with ASD. Healthcare networks must be structured and integrated, from municipal and regional perspectives, with agreements to allow for adequate healthcare services^{5,6}.

Therefore, nurses must be trained to understand and manage the behavioral and sensory specificities of people with ASD. This is because the healthcare context should not remain rooted in conceptions that view it as a pathological process focused solely on the rehabilitation of the body and mind, but rather on the removal of social barriers.

Knowledge of the disorder's characteristics, combined with the ability to recognize early signs and symptoms, enables more assertive, safe, and humane intervention. Furthermore, creating a welcoming, safe, and respectful environment where the individual and their family feel understood in their uniqueness is essential for effective care and the promotion of inclusion^{7,8}.

In this sense, the training and continuous improvement of nursing professionals become indispensable for consolidating inclusive and ethical practices in the care of people with ASD. The articulation between the development of individual competencies and institutional actions to support and strengthen the category favors the dissemination of knowledge and the improvement of care strategies, in addition to meeting the guidelines of Ministry of Health Ordinance No. 793/2012, which established the Care Network for People with Disabilities in the Unified Health System, assigning to the Nurse the technical responsibility for these interventions. It is in this context that the work of the Technical Chamber of

Accessibility and Rehabilitation Nursing of Coren-RJ (Regional Nursing Council of Rio de Janeiro) is situated, whose mission is to promote reflections, training, and initiatives that contribute to a more accessible, sensitive, and committed nursing practice that respects human diversity^{9,10}.

The Technical Chamber for Accessibility and Rehabilitation Nursing of Coren-RJ, created in 2022, is composed of nine nurses who work within the scope of professional practice, promoting debate on accessibility, inclusion, and the role of nursing in defending the rights of people with disabilities. Among its responsibilities are the preparation of technical reports, the promotion of scientific and educational events, and the encouragement of knowledge production on inclusive practices.

Thus, the present report aims to describe the experience of holding an event on nursing care for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, promoted by the Technical Chamber, emphasizing its results and contributions to strengthening inclusive and humanized practice.

Methodology

This is an experience report based on the experiences of the members of the Accessibility and Rehabilitation Nursing Technical Chamber of the Regional Nursing Council of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Coren-RJ) in carrying out two events in April 2024 and 2025, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, a period that marks the month of awareness about ASD.

The narrative was constructed based on direct observations, records, and reflections during the planning, execution, and evaluation phases of the event. The analysis of the experiences sought to understand the subjective, ethical, and pedagogical dimensions of the encounter, valuing experience as a legitimate source of scientific knowledge.

It is noteworthy that, since its creation in 2021, the Technical Chamber has been dedicated to discussing topics related to accessibility, inclusion, and rehabilitation in the context of the nursing profession. Its composition, formed by nurses with extensive experience in the care and rehabilitation of people with disabilities, gives the group a broad and integrated vision of healthcare, articulating knowledge from clinical practice, management, and education.

As a theoretical and methodological framework, the National Policy for Continuing Education in Health (PNEPS) was adopted, which recognizes work as a privileged space for learning, for the collective construction of knowledge, and for the transformation of professional practices¹¹.

From this perspective, the event was understood not only as a training activity but as a dialogical and transformative educational action, based on the principles of problematization, critical reflection, and the horizontal exchange of knowledge.

The methodology adopted, by valuing dialogue and reflection on practice, allowed the event to be understood as a space for the collective production of knowledge,



strengthening the social commitment of nursing, and broadening the perspective on care for people with disabilities. This approach corroborates the concept that training and professional development must be intrinsically linked to the reality of services and the demands of the population served.

Experience Report

Registration for the events was open to the entire nursing system of the state of Rio de Janeiro, with prior announcement through the official channels of the Regional Nursing Council of Rio de Janeiro (Coren-RJ). Participation was free, and the registered audience included nursing professionals, technicians, nursing assistants, and students from different regions and work contexts, which allowed for a rich exchange of experiences and the expansion of discussions on inclusive practices in healthcare. Both events took place in the afternoon and brought together a total of 157 participants, including nursing professionals and students.

The first edition, held in April 2024, featured lectures given by members of the Technical Chamber, one of whom was a nurse and an autistic person, which significantly enriched the debate by integrating their professional perspective and personal experience. In addition, a nurse manager from a referral center for the care of people with ASD in the city of Rio de Janeiro was invited, whose contribution provided an overview of institutional practices focused on inclusion and specialized care.

In the second year, in 2025, the program was expanded to include speakers with professional experience and personal experience with ASD, either because they are autistic or have children with autism, from the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. This diversity of voices strengthened the dialogue and reaffirmed nursing's commitment to truly inclusive and humanized care.

In both events, discussions were proposed regarding the role of nurses in screening and early diagnosis, as well as the inclusion of nursing in the multidisciplinary care team for individuals with ASD. In the second edition, the discussions expanded to topics such as nursing consultations as a tool for monitoring and planning care, communication strategies with non-verbal individuals, with an emphasis on body language and the use of visual and technological resources, and pre-hospital care for people with ASD.

The event also highlighted successful experiences in primary, hospital, and rehabilitation care, reinforcing the importance of comprehensive, interprofessional, and person-centered care. The exchange of experiences among participants demonstrated the collective commitment of nursing to equity, accessibility, and respect for neurodiversity in health services.

Discussion

The event highlighted that continuing education in health is a powerful strategy for improving nursing care and promoting inclusive practices for people with disabilities. This perspective aligns with the National Policy on

Continuing Education in Health (PNEPS), which understands learning as a continuous process linked to daily work and the real needs of the services and populations served¹¹.

Empowering professionals to address the specific needs of ASD directly contributes to reducing attitudinal barriers, expanding acceptance, and improving therapeutic communication^{2,3}. The lack of technical and emotional preparedness on the part of healthcare professionals is still one of the main factors hindering access to and retention of services for people with ASD, making it essential that nursing training includes aspects of nonverbal communication, active listening, and empathy in care.

The nursing approach to individuals with ASD should be grounded in the principles of comprehensiveness, humanization, and respect for diversity, fundamental values of the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS). Recognizing that each person on the spectrum has a unique way of perceiving and interacting with the world is essential for truly person-centered care. Therefore, nurses need to adapt their practice to the particularities of each individual, using personalized sensory and communication strategies, instead of demanding that the person conform to the traditional biomedical model¹².

Furthermore, the reported experience reinforces the role of the Technical Chambers of the Nursing Councils as bodies that promote ethical reflection and professional development. In the case of the Accessibility and Rehabilitation Nursing Technical Chamber of Coren-RJ (Regional Nursing Council of Rio de Janeiro), we observe the materialization of political and technical-scientific space that drives structural changes in healthcare. These spaces contribute to the consolidation of a more critical, reflective, and socially engaged nursing profession, capable of facing the challenges posed by human diversity.

From a legal and ethical standpoint, the actions developed by the Technical Chamber are supported by the Brazilian Inclusion Law (Law No. 13.146/2015), which guarantees people with disabilities the right to full access to healthcare, under conditions of equality and without discrimination. This legislation establishes the duty of the State and professional institutions to guarantee accessible practices, adequate training, and humane care, principles fully incorporated into the event's proposal¹³.

The experience also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, and SDG 10, which proposes reducing social and access inequalities. By fostering discussion about ASD and inclusive practices, the event contributes to achieving these goals, reinforcing nursing's global commitment to equity and human rights^{10,14}.

The experience lived by the Technical Chamber also directly dialogues with the Nursing Theory of Rehabilitation for Well-being, which proposes care as an emancipatory, ethical, and relational process, centered on intersubjectivity and mutual recognition between nurse and person being cared for. This theory understands care as a practice that promotes autonomy, solidarity, and well-being¹⁵. During the events, the presence of nurses, autistic individuals, and



family members in the same speaking space expressed this intersubjective dimension of care, in which all subjects are recognized in their uniqueness.

The act of listening to and engaging in dialogue with individuals with ASD, their families, and nursing professionals constitutes an exercise in recognition and hope, which, according to theory, are pillars of rehabilitative and humanized care. The active participation of autistic individuals as speakers represents social recognition, in which the individual is valued for their autonomy and legitimacy in the public sphere¹².

The theory also proposes the ethical nature of care, understood as "acting with the other," supported by empathy, solidarity, and co-responsibility¹⁵. This dimension was observed in the events as they promoted horizontal dialogue between academic knowledge and lived experiences, reaffirming care as an ethical and political practice. Thus, considering the Nursing Theory of Rehabilitation for Well-being, the events were more than a training activity; they constituted a collective act of recognition, hope, and transformation, contributing to the strengthening of a nursing practice that promotes well-being and the right to difference.

Thus, the reported practice reaffirms the role of nursing as a protagonist in the construction of ethical, scientific, and socially committed care. The event highlighted that nursing, by acting in an interdisciplinary, critical, and inclusive manner, contributes not only to the well-being of people with ASD but also to the transformation of the social and institutional relationships that underpin healthcare. The experience reinforces that accessibility is not limited to physical infrastructure, but above all involves attitudes, communication, and recognition of the dignity of each person assisted.

Conclusion

The event on nursing care for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder reaffirmed the commitment of

the Technical Chamber of Accessibility and Rehabilitation Nursing of Coren-RJ (Regional Nursing Council of Rio de Janeiro) to a professional practice guided by the principles of inclusion, equity, and ethics of care. It highlighted that interprofessional dialogue, the strengthening of continuing education, and respect for human singularities are pillars for consolidating a rehabilitative and socially transformative nursing practice. From the perspective of professional practice, the initiative reinforces that technical competence must go hand in hand with ethical and relational competence. Nurses, when caring for people with disabilities, need to develop communication, sensory, and empathic skills capable of overcoming the physical and attitudinal barriers that still permeate health services. Such practice requires not only clinical knowledge but also a critical stance towards inequalities and institutional structures that limit access to care.

In the broader context of the health of people with disabilities, experience demonstrates the need for public policies and care practices to consider human diversity as a central element of care. Nursing, due to its presence at all levels of care within the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS), plays a strategic role in promoting autonomy, preventing secondary complications, and defending the right to comprehensive rehabilitation. Therefore, events like this represent not only spaces for technical and scientific updating, but also political and social movements for transformation. They reinforce the role of nurses as agents of change, capable of promoting accessible, equitable, and person-centered care. It is therefore recommended that initiatives of this nature be continued and expanded, integrating training institutions, professional councils, and health services, to consolidate a truly inclusive, sensitive, and transformative nursing practice, aligned with the principles of the SUS and the rights of people with disabilities.

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