

SECTION: PAPERS

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES AT PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE CENTERS AS  
A STRATEGY IN NURSING STUDENT TRAINING<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is among nurse's areas of expertise and students must be given the opportunity to learn about it during the undergraduate course. This study aims to describe the practical activities carried out at two Psychosocial Care Centers, in 2017 and 2018, by nursing course students at a higher education institution in Alagoas. The practices are part of the mental health module of two disciplines offered, one discipline in the 3rd and the other in the 4th year of the course. In the outline of this report are aspects that describe the activities and practical fields and show that the use of this alternative as a component in the training of future nurses enhances knowledge construction about the field of mental health. Teaching based on the psychiatric reform process, through practices in substitute services, such as Psychosocial Care Centers, favors the development of skills and competences in assisting people with mental disorders.

**Keywords:** Mental health services. Nursing education. Higher education.

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## ATIVIDADES PRÁTICAS EM CENTROS DE ATENÇÃO PSICOSSOCIAL COMO ESTRATÉGIA NA FORMAÇÃO DE ESTUDANTES DE ENFERMAGEM

### RESUMEN

La salud mental es una de las áreas de especialización de la enfermera y se debe prever en la capacitación de estos estudiantes durante el curso de pregrado. Este estudio tiene como objetivo describir las actividades prácticas llevadas a cabo en dos Centros de Atención Psicosocial, en 2017 y 2018, por estudiantes de la carrera de Enfermería en una institución de educación superior en Alagoas. Las prácticas son parte del módulo de salud mental de dos asignaturas ofrecidas, en el tercer y el otro en el cuarto año del curso de pregrado. En el resumen de este informe, se observan los aspectos que describen las actividades y los campos prácticos y muestran que el uso de esta alternativa como componente en la capacitación de futuras enfermeras mejora la construcción de conocimiento sobre el campo de la salud mental. Enseñanza basada en el proceso de reforma psiquiátrica, a través de servicios sustitutos, como los Centros de Atención Psicosocial, favorece el desarrollo de habilidades y competencias en la atención y el trabajo con personas con trastornos mentales.

**Palabras clave:** Servicios de salud mental. Educación en Enfermería. Educación superior.

## ATIVIDADES PRÁTICAS EM CENTROS DE ATENÇÃO PSICOSSOCIAL COMO ESTRATÉGIA NA FORMAÇÃO DE ESTUDANTES DE ENFERMAGEM

### RESUMO

A saúde mental é uma das áreas de atuação do enfermeiro e deve estar prevista na formação desses estudantes durante o curso de graduação. Este estudo tem como objetivo descrever as atividades práticas realizadas em dois Centros de Atenção Psicossocial, em 2017 e 2018, por estudantes do curso de Enfermagem de uma instituição de ensino superior de Alagoas. As práticas fazem parte do módulo de saúde mental de duas disciplinas ofertadas, uma no terceiro e a outra no quarto ano do curso. No delineamento deste relato, observam-se os aspectos que descrevem as atividades e campos práticos e mostra-se que a utilização desta alternativa como componente na formação dos futuros enfermeiros potencializa a construção do conhecimento sobre o campo da saúde mental. O ensino pautado no processo da reforma psiquiátrica, através de práticas em serviços substitutivos, como os Centros de Atenção Psicossocial, favorece o desenvolvimento de habilidades e competências na assistência da pessoa com transtornos mentais.

**Palavras-chave:** Serviços de saúde mental. Educação em Enfermagem. Educação superior.

## INTRODUCTION

The Psychosocial Care Center (CAPS) is a mental health service, part of the Unified Health Care System (SUS) for the care and assistance of people with mental disorders. It is a territorial and community-based service, with the main objective of offering care through the psychosocial rehabilitation process, in order to provide the individual's reintegration into their family and society through strategies that bring meaning to their existence, contribute to their personal development and value life in society through work (BRASIL, 2017; ALVAREZ, 2019).

In Brazil, there are currently seven different types of CAPS, each aimed at different users and territories: CAPS I, II and III, aimed at adults and the elderly who have severe and persistent mental disorders; the CAPS II for children and adolescents, treating children and adolescents with mental disorders; and CAPS ad II, III and IV, intended for those who abuse alcohol, crack and other drugs. All of them follow the principles of the SUS and are part of the Psychosocial Care Network, which links the CAPS to other health provisions at all three levels (BRASIL, 2017).

For the CAPS to function, in addition to the appropriate physical structure and materials for performing the work, human resources from various professional categories are needed, in both administrative and operational functions, as well as in the care and psychosocial rehabilitation process of users (BRASIL, 2002).

Thus, nursing professionals are part of the essential CAPS work team, in all modalities. Nurses, higher education professionals, become responsible for supervising and managing the activities of the CAPS nursing teams, also working in interdisciplinary functions, in the perspective of users' psychosocial rehabilitation process, along with other professionals in the higher education category (SILVA; BRANDÃO, 2019).

Thus, the National Curricular Guidelines for Nursing (DCN/ENF) state that professional nurses should be trained in the humanist and generalist perspective, qualified to work at all levels and areas of health care, assisting the individual, families and communities in their needs in general, including demands arising from mental health (BRASIL, 2001).

Mental health teaching is a mandatory component of the Nursing curriculum, it must be part of the course pedagogical project and provide the student with an approach to the area of activity and the development of skills for the job. Subjects or modules are usually offered with theoretical-practical activities include in the workload and covering contents related to national mental health policies, nursing care for individuals with mental disorders and interprofessional work, enabling students to construct knowledge about the field of mental health, and preparing them for the job (TAVARES *et al.*, 2016).

Each institution offers subjects according to the reality and perspective of the field in their regions. Thus, it is considered important that, throughout training, students have the opportunity for practical training in mental health services, encouraging their approximation with work process and the development of nursing skills for mental health (SOUZA, 2016; VARGAS *et al.*, 2018).

Although very important, in some undergraduate nursing courses practical activities or internships in the mental health field are not widely used. A study by Vargas *et al.* (2018) mapped the subjects of Psychiatry and Mental Health in undergraduate nursing courses in Brazil and inferred that the vast majority of these subjects have little or no workload for practical activity, according to their course summaries, and that some institutions do not even offer the subject of Mental Health.

The failure to offer such this subject is in line with the National Curricular Guidelines for Nursing (DCN/ENF), which recommend that nurses should be trained through theoretical-practical activities at all levels of health care and in all dimensions of life cycles, responding to society's demands in this area and prepared to work in different health care services (BRASIL, 2001).

According to the DCN/ENF, undergraduate nursing courses must offer supervised curricular internships in the last year of the course, however students can do professional practice throughout the course, which may give them greater confidence and skills for training and professional performance (BRASIL, 2001). However, it is common for students not to undertake mandatory internships in mental health services, as the mandatory internship is, in general, aimed at primary and hospital care, leaving it at the discretion of Mental Health subjects to arrange these practical training opportunities (SANTOS *et al.*, 2016).

Thus, this study was motivated by the need to share the practical experience of Nursing students in the field of mental health, understanding that practical activities at the CAPS are a component of the training for these students that can encourage greater assimilation of the contents and of professional skills in mental health services.

Thus, the aim of this study is to report the experience of practical activities in Psychosocial Care Centers as a strategy in training Nursing students to work in the field of mental health.

### **DESCRIBING THE EXPERIENCE**

This study is a report on experience of practical activities carried out at the CAPS by students on the undergraduate nursing course at a higher education institution in Alagoas. The experience took place in 2017 at CAPS II, for people with severe and persistent mental disorders, through an annual subject offered to students in the third year of the Nursing course; and in 2018, at CAPS ad III, aimed at people who abuse alcohol, crack and other drugs,

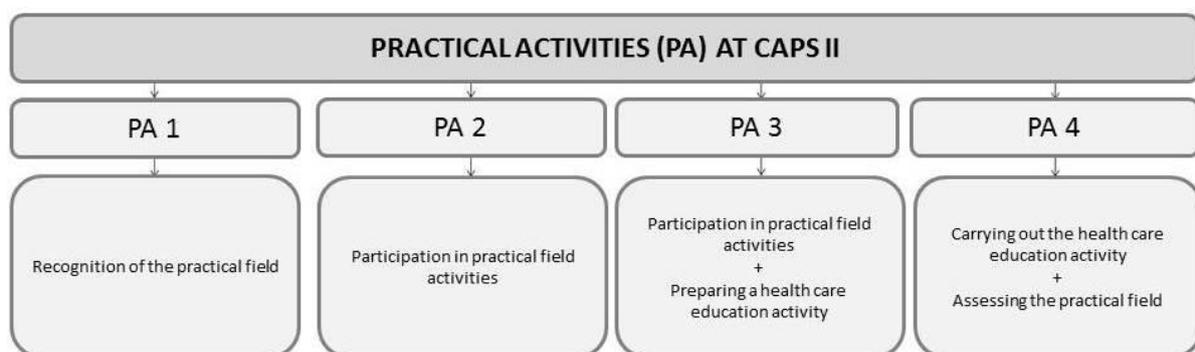
through an annual subject offered to students in the fourth year of the course at the same institution.

These practical activities are components of the mental health module, part of two annual subjects. The theoretical content of the module is taught in the classroom in the same period, but the practice takes place throughout the year. Students are divided into groups of a maximum of five students for four practical activities at the CAPS, each lasting four hours. The groups are not all in the field at the same time, an annual schedule is established. Thus, the next group only goes to the field when the previous one finishes its activities.

The practical activities aim to bring students closer to mental health services so that they can recognize the work done, get closer to professionals and users, in addition to becoming familiar with strategies for work and their application. Thus, the practices were structured to encourage visualization and application of what is shared in the classroom.

### Psychosocial Care Center II: people with severe and persistent mental disorders

The practical activities at CAPS II took place on Wednesdays in June 2017, in the morning shift, accompanied by the teacher responsible for the theoretical and practical Mental Health module. In this type of service, the focus is on treatment and psychosocial rehabilitation of adults with severe and persistent mental disorders. The activities were organized according to the schedule shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1** – Schedule of practical activities at the Psychosocial Care Center II for students in the third year of the Nursing course, in 2017.

Source: the authors, 2020.

Expectation for the field was high, given that it was the students' first contact with mental health services. On the first day of practice, they got to know the service. Students and teacher were received by the CAPS coordinator, who introduced them to the whole place, the professionals and shared a little about the service routine. After this introduction, the students were welcomed and accompanied by the service nurse, responsible for the entire nursing team and work, to talk about the routine in this area at CAPS. As this is the first contact with

the service, students did not participate in the activities that day. It was an opportunity to learn about the work process and how actions are developed at the service.

On the second day, students first shadowed activities and actions performed by the nursing team, such as checking users' vital signs, monitoring guidance given and administering medication. Later, the students accompanied therapeutic workshops in the craft room, where crochet, embroidery, painting, cutting and sewing, among others, are held.

On the third day of practice, the students first accompanied the service professionals in a waiting room activity, with all present, about body hygiene care. Later, they accompanied the therapeutic group held by the service occupational therapist and psychologist. The topic was daily activities at home with family members. At the end of the day, students met with the teacher to develop a health education activity to be carried out with users the following week. After a brief discussion, the topic chosen by the students was food education and physical activity. The proposal was to work with posters and images, too, and to hold a Zumba class.

On the fourth and final day, students delivered a health education activity at CAPS on healthy eating and physical activity. Two posters were created, one with the phrase "eat more" and the other with the phrase "eat less", and images of various types of food were presented to users. The purpose of the activity was explained to users and they were asked to add what they should eat more of and less of to the posters. At the end of the activity, the posters were pasted on the CAPS wall and certain healthy eating strategies were explained.

After the health education activity, students explained the importance of physical activity and offered a thirty-minute Zumba class for users, family members and service professionals. At the end of the day, the students met with the teacher to assess the practical field, discussing the positive aspects and what should be improved in the practices. An evaluation form was given to each student to discuss the positive and negative points, as well as suggestions for the practical routine at the CAPS.

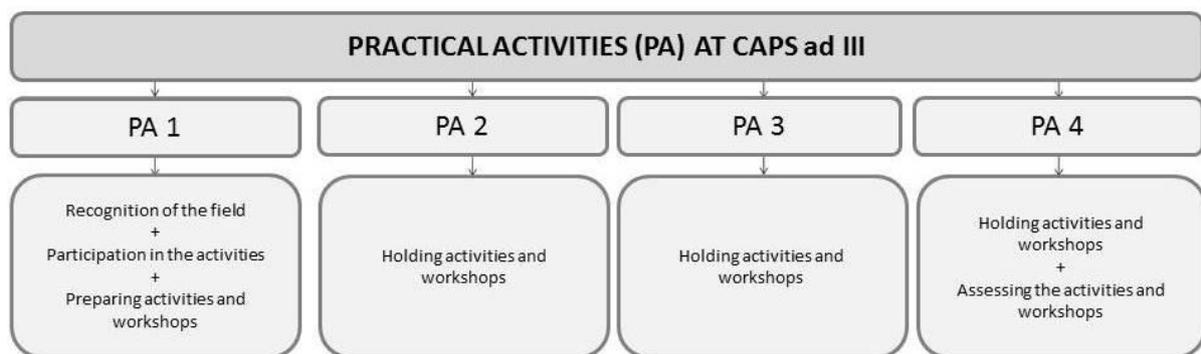
Positive aspects pointed out by the students included the welcome given by the CAPS when receiving them, the openness of the professionals so that the students could accompany the activities and also the opportunity to create and apply an activity with users. The only negative aspect students pointed was the limited availability of days in the practical field.

### **Psychosocial Care Center ad III: people abusing alcohol and other drugs**

The practical activities at CAPS ad III took place on Tuesday in March 2018, in the morning shift, accompanied by the teacher responsible for the theoretical and practical mental health module. In this type of service, the focus is on treatment and psychosocial rehabilitation of people who abuse alcohol, crack and other drugs.

In this second field, expectations were related to performing activities more autonomously, allowing the students to take the lead. On the first day, they got to know the service, students learned about the CAPS environment and structure, the professionals, the work routine, the proposed activities, the operation and the service users. This time, on the first day, the students had the opportunity to participate in the activities and, at the end of the shift, planned coming actions.

In contrast to the structure of the previous year's practices, the proposal this time is to encourage students to participate in and construct the activities and workshops from the very beginning, as we can see in the schedule in Figure 2:



**Figure 2** – Schedule of practical activities at the Psychosocial Care Center ad III, for students of the fourth year of the Nursing course, in 2018.

Source: the authors, 2020.

To decide which activities and workshops would be held in the coming practices, the students interacted with the users to learn more about their history and to plan which strategies would be used. At the end, the students gathered the users together and shared the options for activities, asking their opinions on what they would like to do in the coming weeks. Thus, the options that emerged were: games in general, cinema and drawing, with a focus on interpersonal relationships, collaboration and teamwork.

On the second day of practice, the Nursing students held a “Cinema at CAPS” session with users, in which two short films were shown: a cartoon about teamwork<sup>4</sup>; and another about family and interpersonal relationships<sup>5</sup>. At the end of the first film, the students proposed a discussion with users about collaborative activities and teamwork. Then, at the end of the second film, the students raised questions about family relationships. The focus was to show users that CAPS is a favorable environment for strengthening relationships, whether user-user or user-professional.

<sup>4</sup> PRESTO: Digiotagione & his hat of wonder - Walt Disney and Pixar Animation Studios Cartoon.

<sup>5</sup> La Luna - Pixar Animation Studios Cartoon.

These discussions were possible because, in general, CAPS ad users preserve a sufficient level of awareness, communication and collaboration, unlike those at other CAPS, in whom these functions are more compromised, making it impossible, at times, to establish interpersonal relationships.

On the third day, the students split up into small groups with the users and organized games such as dominoes, card games, games with balls, among others. The intention of the games was to bring up the perspective of relations with others, following the line proposed in the previous activity. At the end of the games, a CAPS professional held a dance activity, in which the students also participated and encouraged everyone to participate.

In the fourth and last week, the students did a cutting, collage and free drawing workshop. This time, it was reinforcing teamwork, collaboration and the importance of healthy relationships. While users did their paintings and drawings, the importance of helping others and sharing materials was emphasized.

At the end of the day, the students met with the teacher and assessed the practical module on the evaluation form, once again pointing out the positive and negative points, their perceptions about learning and work, both for improving the subject and for their own development as future nurses.

The following aspects were positively scored: greater openness to work and actions developed and conducted by the students themselves, which they could lead (differently from the previous experience, in which they were assistants in the activity), and also greater confidence in what was accomplished. As a negative aspect, the students again pointed out the low workload for practical activities, in addition to the lack of opportunities for carrying out nursing consultations, one of the important instruments of the work process in this area and which allows procedures and assessments to be carried out, such as physical and mental examination, to learn more about the user's clinical situation.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the outline of this report, it can be seen that nursing students from a public higher education institution had the opportunity to experience work in the field of mental health, through practices carried out at two Psychosocial Care Centers. This time was important for students to see what had been addressed in the classroom in practice, such as health education actions, recreational activities and workshops.

The greatest contribution practical activities at CAPS offered students was precisely the opportunity to put into practice knowledge that had been constructed and professional tools that had been developed through the theoretical content discussed in the classroom. We learn

best when we have opportunities to do, execute, accomplish things. And that is precisely what the Nursing students experienced in these two practical fields.

A study by Oliveira *et al.* (2018), using the practical simulation method, showed that students find it easier to assimilate theoretical content about mental health care when opportunities for practical development are provided, as it allows the teaching-learning process to go beyond the classroom and be put into practice, as in a real mental health care situation.

Integrating theoretical content with practical experience, especially in mental health services themselves, such as the CAPS, improves the training of future professionals who are trained to work in mental health services in a more qualified way (MENDES *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore, such practical activities carried out at the Psychosocial Care Center are one of the resources used by teachers of mental health subjects as an opportunity to develop nursing skills and abilities for health care for people with mental disorders and who need, above all, a good professional-user relationship (TAVARES *et al.*, 2016).

Experience in the practical field is known to enable better approximation with the reality of health care, through its professionals, users and service routine. This perspective of work through its actors in the services enables students to become familiar with the strategies and reflect on the different forms of work (MARRAN; SILVA; SALES, 2017).

Although there are others, CAPS is still considered the main mental health service in Brazil, making it, for Nursing students, the main job opportunity in assisting people with mental disorders. Thus, when students have the opportunity to experience the service routine and to participate in activities, this better prepares to work in the future as a nurse, at any type of CAPS (REIS; PEDRAS, 2017).

Therefore, it is important that educational institutions establish partnerships with health departments, so that CAPS can be used as a practice field for students. Even so, the use of CAPS as a practical field will also depend on how the Psychosocial Care Network is organized in the region and how these services are distributed in the territory, if at all.

We can perceive the evolution of the proposed practices between the two experiences. While in the first one, at CAPS II, students were more like participants in activities already existing at the service, only at the end able to carry out an action they themselves had planned, at CAPS ad III it is already possible to see these students as protagonists in planning and executing actions at the services.

This evolution of the students between the practical fields occurs, mainly, when the organization of the subjects encourages different moments for professional maturation and monitors the students from the beginning of their training process in a determined area and

field. Therefore, it is important for teachers to act as facilitators of this process, placing students in a more active role in their own training process.

It is well known that the field of mental health requires, above all, interdisciplinarity and interprofessionality. In the context of training health care students, Silva and Ribeiro (2018) point out that it is often only possible to visualize its application in practice environments and internships as, in the classroom, classes are always specific to each course, without a great deal of interaction with others. Therefore, as a proposal for the second practical field, students planned and carried out activities with users, also counting on the participation of other service professionals, especially the nursing team.

This closeness with the CAPS Nursing professionals also provides an effective view of the nurse's role in the services. A study by Silva and Brandão (2019) shows that nursing still does not have great prominence in the actions of psychosocial rehabilitation carried out by multiprofessional teams, being more restricted to bureaucratic roles or nursing care, such as administration and guidance on medicines, dressings, among others.

Regarding the activities carried out by the students, it is important to emphasize that workshops and activities, if they are to be considered therapeutic, must promote transformation in individuals, be it transformation in their perception of the world, in attitudes, in conduct, among others. Thus, the students were able to construct different activities, but with the purpose of proposing reflection and the exercise of group relations and collaboration (CONSTANTINIDIS et al., 2018).

The activities carried out by students at CAPS are the most commonly developed actions at the services, such as monitoring activities performed by users, workshops and therapeutic activities, welcoming, therapeutic conversation, health education, among others. Some activities are carried out specifically by the nursing team, but most actions and groups are carried out collectively and interprofessionally (SILVA; BRANDÃO; OLIVEIRA, 2019).

This reflection on what activities students were able use was only possible through observation and communication between students and users. While in the first practical field, the choice of the topic was more by observation and some dialogue with users, in the second field students were able to establish direct communication with everyone in order to discover their needs, which is very important in developing the psychosocial rehabilitation process.

Such communication with users must respect everyone's limitations. While at the CAPS II, communication is more limited by the severe and persistent conditions of the individuals, at CAPS ad III it is possible to establish more lasting communication, as users are more collaborative and aware (JALLES; SANTOS; REINALDO, 2017).

In this process of nursing student training, becoming familiar with the reality of services such as CAPS encourages more guided training in the perspective of psychiatric reform, in which individuals with mental disorders can be treated within the community and work to encourage their social inclusion (MARTINS *et al.*, 2018).

Thus, the objectives proposed by the two subjects in their two practical fields, shown in Figures 1 and 2, have been achieved. The students got to know the services, the professionals and work process, participated in holding therapeutic groups, carried out a health education action, educational activities, exercised therapeutic communication and qualified listening, acted in interprofessional and interdisciplinary way and assessed both their own performance and the subject.

Likewise, the practical activities expanded the students' training, contributing to training generalist nurses, preparing them to work in all fields of nursing, including mental health, through CAPS, as well as maternity hospitals, hospitals, health units, among other services. Thus, when nursing students find themselves in a mental health service, they have the opportunity for more qualified and complete training to work in caring for people with mental disorders.

Thus, taking into account the social responsibility of higher education institutions in training qualified health care professionals, the more they provide practical activities throughout the undergraduate Nursing training process, especially at the health care services themselves, the more prepared students will be for comprehensive care at all levels of health care.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In the outline of this report are aspects describing the activities and practical fields and show that the use of this alternative as a component in the training of future nurses enhances the construction of knowledge about the field of mental health, based on the psychiatric reform process, through substitute services, such as CAPS, and also in the development of skills in caring for and working with people with mental disorders.

It shows that it was possible to apply certain activities, developed by the students, with the contents acquired in the classroom and with resources from the services themselves. Thus, holding workshops and activities, such as health education, reinforces the need for preparation and work in order to carry them out.

Thus, the practical fields are of great value in the process of training students, knowing that professional nurses are part of the human resources needed to assist people with mental disorders at all levels of health care, especially at the CAPS.

It should be noted that this experience shows a temporal and regional approach, describing the activities carried out by students from a single institution, and further research is needed to discover how other institutions develop practical activities with Nursing students and which services are covered.

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