

SECTION: ARTICLES

Faculty perspectives on preparation for the nurse educator role in undergraduate nursing¹

A formação para a prática docente segundo professores de um curso de graduação em Enfermagem

La formación para la práctica docente según los profesores de un curso de licenciatura en Enfermería

Lorena Gleice Azevedo da Silva,² Karina Xavier de Lima,³ Jéssica Karoline Alves Portugal,⁴ Nair Chase da Silva,⁵ Hyana Kamila Ferreira de Oliveira⁶

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study examines an undergraduate nursing program at a public higher education institution of the state of Amazonas, Brazil, focusing on how pedagogical preparation for teaching is addressed in nurse training and how faculty understand this aspect of their role. **Objective:** To investigate how pedagogical preparation for teaching is incorporated into nurse training from the perspective of faculty in an undergraduate nursing program. **Methods:** We conducted a qualitative exploratory-descriptive study with nine nurse educators at a public higher education institution in the state of Amazonas. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews exploring how pedagogical preparation for

¹ The authors were responsible for translating this article into English.

² Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), Manaus, AM, Brazil.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0749-8234>. Email: lgleice10@gmail.com

³ Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), Manaus, AM, Brazil.

Email: kaxlima2000@gmail.com

⁴ Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), Manaus, AM, Brazil.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0142-2315>. Email: jessica.isb.ufam@gmail.com

⁵ Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), Manaus, AM, Brazil.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5880-4138>. Email: nairchase@yahoo.com.br

⁶ Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), Manaus, AM, Brazil.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8070-0263>. Email: hyanakamila@ufam.edu.br

teaching is incorporated into nurses' educational practice. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. **Results:** Professional development for teaching is a continuous process, yet pedagogical gaps hinder nurses' transition into academic roles. Undergraduate teaching assistantships in the nursing program were described as an early pathway to an academic career. The findings underscore the need for pedagogical training and specific qualifications focused on teaching practice for nurse educators. **Conclusion:** Experiences during undergraduate training, such as participation in assistantships, have emerged as an important factor in choosing an academic career. However, because nursing has historically been centered on clinical care, undergraduate nursing education does not adequately prepare professionals for teaching careers, leaving pedagogical gaps in undergraduate nursing programs.

Keywords: education; nursing; nursing education; nursing degree programs; curriculum.

RESUMO

Introdução: o presente estudo tem como enfoque o curso de graduação de Enfermagem de uma Instituição de Ensino Superior pública no interior do Amazonas, Brasil, especificamente, como a abordagem à educação é apresentada na formação de enfermeiros e quais as concepções adquiridas acerca da temática por docentes da graduação. **Objetivo:** investigar como se dá a inserção da educação para a prática docente na formação de enfermeiros segundo docentes de um curso de graduação em Enfermagem. **Método:** pesquisa exploratória e descritiva com abordagem qualitativa realizada com nove docentes de Enfermagem em uma Instituição de Ensino Superior pública do Amazonas. Os dados foram obtidos por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas visando explorar como a formação docente é incorporada na prática educativa de enfermeiros. A técnica escolhida para análise dos dados qualitativos foi a análise de conteúdo na modalidade análise temática. **Resultados:** o aprimoramento para a docência é um processo contínuo existindo lacunas pedagógicas que dificultam a inserção de enfermeiros na docência; a monitoria ainda na graduação é um elemento precursor para a escolha da carreira docente; torna-se necessário capacitações pedagógicas e qualificações específicas que abordem a prática pedagógica para estes docentes. **Conclusão:** experiências vivenciadas durante a graduação, tais como a monitoria, tem se mostrado preditora valiosa para a escolha da carreira docente, no entanto, por se tratar de uma profissão com caráter assistencialista, esta, por sua vez, não prepara os profissionais para a carreira docente, fazendo com que existam lacunas pedagógicas na graduação de Enfermagem.

Palavras-chave: educação; enfermagem; educação em enfermagem; programas de graduação em enfermagem; currículo.

RESUMEN

Introducción: este estudio se centra en el programa de pregrado de Enfermería de una institución pública de educación superior del interior del estado de Amazonas, Brasil, específicamente en cómo se presenta el enfoque educativo en la formación en enfermería y los conceptos adquiridos sobre la materia por el profesorado de pregrado. **Objetivo:** investigar cómo se integra la formación con la práctica docente en la formación en enfermería según el profesorado de un programa de pregrado de Enfermería. **Método:** investigación exploratoria y descriptiva con un enfoque cualitativo realizada con nueve profesores de Enfermería en una institución pública de educación superior en el estado de Amazonas. Los datos se recopilaron mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas para explorar cómo se incorpora la formación docente en la práctica educativa de las enfermeras. La técnica elegida para analizar los datos cualitativos fue el análisis de contenido mediante análisis temático. **Resultados:** el desarrollo docente es un proceso continuo, con lagunas pedagógicas que dificultan la inclusión de las enfermeras en la docencia. La tutoría durante los estudios de pregrado es un predictor de la elección de una carrera docente. La formación pedagógica y las cualificaciones específicas que abordan la práctica pedagógica son necesarias para estos profesores. **Conclusión:** las experiencias durante los estudios de pregrado, como la tutoría, han demostrado ser un valioso predictor para la elección de una carrera docente. Sin embargo, al ser una profesión de naturaleza asistencialista, esto, a su vez, no prepara a los profesionales para una carrera docente, lo que resulta en lagunas pedagógicas en los estudios de pregrado en Enfermería.

Palabras clave: educación; enfermería; educación en enfermería; programas de grado en enfermería; plan de estudios.

INTRODUCTION

Being a teacher in Brazil requires meeting specific prerequisites. The requirement to demonstrate pedagogical competencies is more strongly emphasized in early childhood, elementary, and secondary education. In contrast, in vocational and higher education, pedagogical competence is not a formal curricular requirement (Manhães; Tavares, 2020).

In nursing, which accounts for the largest share of the health workforce, significant changes have occurred in an effort to keep pace with contemporary historical, political, economic, and social dynamics (Mattia; Kleba; Prado, 2018). To practice effectively, nurses need technical expertise, management skills, ethical grounding, a humanized approach to care, and the ability to deliver interdisciplinary, comprehensive care (Netto; Silva; Rua, 2018).

In recent years, health professional education in Brazil has increasingly focused on meeting the demands of the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) and on changes in the population's demographic and epidemiological profile (Netto; Silva; Rua, 2018). In parallel, nursing practice has expanded beyond direct clinical care into areas such as product and personnel

management, quality control audits, roles in private companies, and teaching, with teaching in particular having grown markedly in recent years.

Teaching is an expanding field of work for nurses at different educational levels. However, despite what appears to be a robust curriculum and an effective model of generalist education, the specific requirements of teacher preparation for nurses are not addressed during undergraduate training (Manhães; Tavares, 2020).

Teaching methods in undergraduate nursing programs still largely follow a traditional theory–practice model centered on care-based approaches. Moreover, the curriculum does not develop the specific competencies needed to prepare future nurses for teaching (Manhães; Tavares, 2020; Ghezzi et al., 2021). This situation calls for discussion and change, given the growing number of nurses entering teaching positions.

As a result, nurses often base their teaching on personal experience rather than on critical, reflective, and emancipatory pedagogical frameworks. The pedagogical foundations of nursing, therefore, remain underemphasized, limiting the extent to which teaching methods can be substantially transformed (Netto; Silva; Rua, 2018).

Currently, several initiatives in undergraduate programs across Brazil are designed to strengthen pedagogical preparation, including academic peer tutoring programs structured as undergraduate teaching assistantships. According to Silva et al. (2021), these programs are co-curricular activities commonly undertaken by university students and benefit undergraduates by helping prepare them for the job market. Taking on this role places students in a mediating position in the teaching–learning process, allowing them to participate actively in developing innovative teaching strategies. This role fosters a more critical and constructive approach to teaching and learning, facilitates the exchange of experiences, sparks interest in teaching, and helps undergraduate teaching assistants contribute to a dynamic, interactive educational environment.

With respect to nurse education, this study focuses on the undergraduate nursing program at a public higher education institution (HEI) located in a city outside Manaus, the state capital and main metropolitan area in the state of Amazonas, Brazil. It examines how pedagogical preparation for teaching is addressed in undergraduate nursing education and how nurse educators understand this aspect of their role.

This study adds to the body of knowledge on nurse education by highlighting ways to strengthen the development of teaching competencies and pedagogical skills during undergraduate training. We examined how pedagogical preparation for teaching practice is incorporated into undergraduate nursing education from the perspective of nurse educators. The study is justified by the scarcity of publications on this topic, the growing number of nurses

entering teaching, and the persistence of educational activities that lack adequate pedagogical preparation.

METHOD

Study design and period

We conducted a qualitative exploratory-descriptive study. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, capturing the more complex dimensions of relationships, processes, and phenomena that cannot be reduced to measurable variables (Minayo, 2013). Data collection was carried out from September to November 2023.

Study setting

The study was conducted at a public higher education institution (HEI) in a municipality in the northern region of the state of Amazonas, Brazil.

Study participants

Nine nurse educators in the institution's undergraduate nursing program took part in the study. The inclusion criterion was being a nurse currently teaching in the program. Faculty members who scheduled an interview but did not attend, even after rescheduling attempts, were excluded.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling from a list of active faculty members provided by the program coordinator. We sent the Invitations to institutional email addresses and then reinforced them in person, according to each educator's availability. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants.

The final sample size was determined by data saturation, which was considered to have been reached when interviews began to yield repetitive information and no new analytic categories or relevant meanings emerged (Minayo, 2013).

Data collection and organization

A trained researcher collected data through individual semi-structured interviews conducted in a private room at the institution, ensuring privacy and comfort. After participants signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF), interviews lasting 40–120 minutes were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. We then analyzed the transcripts using Bardin's content analysis, which treats them as data that can be systematically examined for meaning (Bardin, 2016).

The semi-structured interview guide had two sections. The first gathered personal and professional information — age, gender, marital status, academic degree, length of teaching experience, and area of training — to characterize the participants. The second section comprised guiding questions for the participants, namely:

- What motivated you to become a nurse educator?
- During your undergraduate program, did you receive any training on teaching or pedagogical practices in your profession?
- How do you develop your teaching practice?
- Since the beginning of your career, have you noticed changes in your teaching practice?
- What contributed to the changes you identified?
- What expectations do you have as a nurse educator?
- What do you hope to achieve through your teaching practice?
- Which factors facilitate your pedagogical practice?
- Which factors do you consider barriers to developing your pedagogical practice?
- Are you satisfied with your performance as a nurse educator? Why?
- What could be done to improve your performance as a nurse educator?
- Do you consider your pedagogical practice aligned with the graduate profile defined in the National Curriculum Guidelines (Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais, DCN) for undergraduate nursing programs?
- What are the main challenges nurses face when entering teaching in higher education?

Ethical considerations

The study complied with Resolution 466/12 of the Brazilian National Health Council, which regulates research involving human participants. It was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa, CEP). We identified participants using codes composed of the letters I (interview) and E (excerpt), followed by numbers indicating the chronological order of interviews and excerpts (e.g., I1E4 – interview 1, excerpt 4), thereby ensuring confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study.

Data analysis

We used thematic analysis, following three stages: pre-analysis, thorough exploration of the material, and interpretation of the findings. This approach treats the “theme” as the core unit of meaning, helping capture the central ideas in participants’ accounts and relate them to one another through words, phrases, or concise summaries. According to Bardin (2016), a theme is a unit of meaning that emerges from the text, connects with the adopted theoretical framework, and guides understanding of the study phenomenon.

RESULTS

Nine nurse educators from the undergraduate nursing program participated in the study. Seven participants were women (n = 7; 77.8%) and two were men (n = 2; 22.2%). Most were 20–30 years old (n = 4; 44.4%); three were 30–40 years old (n = 3; 33.3%), one was 40–50 years old (n = 1; 11.1%), and one was older than 50 years (n = 1; 11.1%). Regarding marital status, five were married (n = 5; 55.5%) and four were never married (n = 4; 44.5%). As for academic degree, four held a master's degree (n = 4; 44.4%), three held a doctoral degree (n = 3; 33.3%), and two were currently enrolled in graduate programs (n = 2; 22.2%).

Teaching experience ranged from 0 to 25 years: three educators had 0–3 years of teaching experience (n = 3; 33.3%), one had 4–6 years (n = 1; 11.1%), three had 7–14 years (n = 3; 33.3%), and two had 15–25 years (n = 2; 22.2%). Six educators reported having taken pedagogical training courses during their graduate certificate, master's, or doctoral studies (n = 6; 66.7%), while three (n = 3; 33.3%) reported not having received any formal pedagogical preparation.

From the educators' accounts, three categories related to teacher preparation emerged: Category 1 – Faculty development: learning in practice and constantly adapting; Category 2 – Nurses in teaching: addressing gaps in their academic preparation; Category 3 – Encouraging and addressing the need for pedagogical training among nurse educators.

Category 1 – Faculty development: learning in practice and constantly adapting

Participants unanimously described faculty development as a continuous process that unfolds over time as they gain experience throughout their careers:

"[...] we only really start to learn how to teach once we are in the classroom and can see how we want to do things — how to get students' attention, how to convey the content — and we keep shaping our teaching practice day by day." (I1E4)

"[...] we begin with an idea, with a theory — I'm going to do it this way; I think this way is better — but in practice we deal with different situations, we work with human beings, and each person learns differently, so we keep reshaping what we do based on practice." (I2E4)

"I mix approaches, you know? [the way I teach] [...] they're not really used to the active part yet, this whole problem-based learning (PBL) approach, so I still use traditional methods with the classes, but I also bring a lot of active learning strategies into my lessons." (I7E3)

Participants highlighted that professional experience plays a key role in how they develop and mobilize their knowledge, and they emphasized the value of teamwork. This collaborative

process is enriched by interaction with colleagues and students, along with the theoretical and technical foundations that underpin their teaching and support more effective classroom practice.

“Every semester, with each new group that starts, I try to change some of the things I did before [...] ‘I’m not going to do that anymore because I didn’t like it, it didn’t work, so I’ll change it for this next group.’ I also get tips from other professors, you know? [...] we always have to look for ways to improve, to refine my own way of teaching.” (I3E3)

“I learn from my colleagues and students, and it’s always that challenge where you ask yourself, ‘How can I do better next semester?’” (I6E3)

Participants also described how their clinical and classroom teaching experience has helped them adopt more innovative approaches, including active learning methods and realistic simulations, making teaching more engaging and accessible for students.

“I came back from a residency in a clinical area, and I’m still figuring out what works and what doesn’t — and that takes time. I’m going to find out through my classroom teaching, but I can say that during this period, I’ve used methods and forms of simulation that I didn’t have access to, and neither did the cohorts after mine. So if today I can teach complex content [...] why not teach it in a way that is lighter and easier to understand? In a way that is still realistic, important, and enriching, but doesn’t become something traumatic for students?” (I2E10)

“In the classroom, what I really see as helpful are the methods we use, you know? You apply them and then [...] you get that feedback.” (I5E6)

“These days I teach in a way that is very different from what I experienced many years ago [...], but I was able to develop and rethink that over time — when I did my master’s, when I did my PhD. Students should play a leading role in the teaching–learning process, so nowadays we talk a lot about active learning methods, and these methods need to be embedded in teaching and learning [...]. Today, I try to bring in a range of different methods [...] so that the process feels lighter and more engaging. I think I gained that experience over time. So what I do now — of course, I’ve changed some things, especially in terms of creativity.” (I4E3)

Category 2 – Nurses in teaching: addressing gaps in their academic preparation

Participants reported that the undergraduate nursing program provides specialized knowledge in their field, but this alone does not prepare them for a teaching career.

“[...] Since we don’t receive any preparation for teaching during our undergraduate program [...] we’ve never been educators, we’re nurses — and suddenly you become the main source of information.” (I1E11)

“Undergraduate education really prepares you to work as a nurse in direct patient care, not in teaching. So I came from a clinical practice background (both in my undergraduate program and graduate certificate) [...] I was a clinical nurse, and now I find myself in a completely different world.” (I2E8)

“[...] I struggled a bit when I started as a professor, even back when I was a temporary lecturer, because I didn’t get that preparation in my undergraduate program, so everything was very new to me.” (I3E3)

“We nurses don’t receive any training in teaching at the higher-education level.” (I4E11)

“You really have to study and figure it out on your own, so I see that as one of the biggest challenges: we come in as nurses without any pedagogical training, because that was never part of our education.” (I6E11)

“There is a gap in the nursing curriculum when it comes to topics and contexts that could address teaching practice.” (I8E2)

Participants also emphasized the importance of undergraduate teaching assistantships, which they viewed as an early pathway into an academic career.

“My experience as an undergraduate teaching assistant helped shape that decision [...] ‘I want to pursue teaching.’” (I1E2)

“During my undergraduate program, I had the chance to work as a teaching assistant, and that was when I felt closest to teaching. I was a funded teaching assistant in a health assessment course, and I liked it! I see that as an important turning point for my teaching practice.” (I2E1)

“And that teaching assistant role, whether you realize it or not, gets students engaged in seeing themselves as future educators; it kind of awakens that desire to teach. That’s when you start organizing classes, helping the professor, grading exams — doing all the things that are part of the assistantship program [...] I was a teaching assistant three times during my undergraduate program, and that only strengthened my desire to teach even more.” (I8E2)

Category 3 – Encouraging and addressing the need for pedagogical training among nurse educators

Participants emphasized that encouragement, ongoing training, and professional development for faculty are essential to ensuring high-quality teaching. In the absence of adequate preparation, they often find themselves improvising their pedagogical practice.

“If we had courses for faculty, training courses on how to work in the classroom — ‘look, you do it this way; this works, this doesn’t’— I think things would improve a lot. Sometimes we just end up in this role and do whatever seems easiest to us, but if someone with more experience came and taught us, taught us how to teach, I think it would be much better.” (I3E9)

“I don’t think my teaching practice is where I would like it to be yet [...] I believe this really calls for more effort, not only from me but also from my colleagues, because the teaching – learning process today is very different and we need to pay attention to students’ needs and to the needs of each class [...]. So we need to bring in technology and approaches that motivate students even more. I think active learning methods are a basic requirement for us nowadays, so we need to take part in training courses. I think active learning methods are a basic requirement for us nowadays, so we need to take part in training courses.” (I6E3)

“I think we also need training courses, especially in the area of teaching — on how to be a teacher, which is something we don’t have. If you ask around, hardly anyone has taken that kind of course [...] there is a graduate certificate in teaching in higher education; I think that’s the idea.” (I7E9)

DISCUSSION

The findings show that, for the nurse educators interviewed, pedagogical development is a continuous process built over the course of their professional careers. Their accounts also revealed gaps in teacher education within undergraduate nursing programs, which hinder nurses’ preparation for the nurse educator role.

Although the educators understand that developing their teaching practice requires ongoing, interactive, and cumulative learning in diverse formats, they appear willing to rethink established concepts and move beyond a model focused on reproducing knowledge. They seek to develop original, creative approaches and design their own teaching strategies for the classroom.

Similarly, a study with nurse educators at a public university in Southern Brazil highlighted the need for them to develop knowledge and skills related to active and innovative teaching strategies, so they can move away from traditional nursing education and further their professional development (Martins et al., 2022).

Participants in the present study also reported facing new challenges each semester, driven by demands that call for flexibility and adaptability. These demands include incorporating new educational technologies and adopting innovative pedagogical practices, with an emphasis on knowledge exchange among nurse educators, students, and peers.

These findings are consistent with a study conducted in Teresina, state of Piauí, in an undergraduate nursing program that examined didactic obstacles in nurse educators’ teaching practice. The difficulties reported by participants in that study mirrored those described here and elsewhere, underscoring the lack of structured pedagogical preparation for faculty working in health education (Amaral; Boery, 2022).

Because most nurses in this study entered teaching immediately after graduation, they struggled to balance teaching practice with health care delivery. The lack of specific preparation for teaching and its consequences create barriers to both faculty's professional development and students' education. Their narratives reveal the challenges they faced when they suddenly found themselves in a field for which they felt unprepared, often leading them to fall back on more traditional approaches to nursing education. A study at a higher education institution in Piauí with ten nurse educators likewise found that participants had not taken any undergraduate course specifically focused on teaching, suggesting that nurses learn to teach from their own practice (Reis; André, 2020). Our findings align with those results.

In this context, developing and implementing teacher education policies grounded in the National Curriculum Guidelines (Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais, DCN) is essential for preparing nurse educators (Brasil, 2001). In addition, HEIs should develop programs and initiatives to strengthen pedagogical preparation for teaching, which in turn can significantly enhance students' education and training (Reis; André, 2020).

Participants' experiences highlighted the positive impact of undergraduate teaching assistantships on early preparation for and engagement with teaching, reinforcing their desire to work in education. Their accounts show how these assistantships can become turning points by offering hands-on involvement in teaching. Participants also reported that activities such as preparing classes and supporting faculty with tasks like grading assignments and exams were crucial for sparking and consolidating their interest in education. According to Barros et al. (2020), teaching assistantships provide substantial academic and social benefits by increasing motivation, communication, logical reasoning, understanding, and pedagogical sensitivity, while also fostering deeper comprehension and teaching skills that are essential for preparing future educators—findings that are consistent with the present study.

Interviewees also underscored the need for ongoing training and professional development to ensure the quality of teaching. Investing in and supporting faculty development is key to achieving excellence in nursing education, especially in a constantly evolving educational landscape. Continuing professional development helps refine teaching techniques, classroom management, and assessment strategies, leading to a more effective learning environment for students. In a similar study, Silva et al. (2022) argued that, to ensure an effective teaching–learning process, it is essential to provide faculty with training and development not only in pedagogy but also in political, social and research perspectives.

The use of more interactive teaching methods was another prominent theme in participants' accounts. One educator noted that their current teaching practice differs markedly from what they experienced years ago, largely because these approaches have been incorporated into the teaching–learning process. Amaral and Boery (2022) highlighted didactic strategies such as problem-based learning, simulations, and case studies, which make teaching more interactive and enable students to take an active role in their own learning.

In line with these findings, Van Bower et al. (2021) showed that implementing teaching and learning strategies promotes reflection and personal growth. Fontes et al. (2019) noted that, to educate critical, reflective students, it is crucial to focus on pedagogical practice, with the teacher playing a central role as a guide. Taken together, these findings indicate that participants recognize how using more contemporary teaching methods not only improves the quality of instruction but also supports students' overall development, better preparing them for professional challenges. There is also a need to emphasize nurse educators' own responsibility for their teaching practice and ongoing development, actively seeking opportunities for continuing education rather than placing the entire responsibility for their pedagogical preparation on the HEI.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study explored how preparation for the nurse educator role is incorporated into nursing education, from the perspective of nurse educators at a public higher education institution located in a city outside Manaus, the state capital of Amazonas, Brazil.

The findings showed that teaching practice is a continuous, dynamic process that requires continual adaptation to changing demands and that experiences during undergraduate training, such as teaching assistantships, can act as early catalysts for choosing a teaching career. However, because nursing has historically been centered on clinical care, undergraduate nursing education does not adequately prepare professionals to teach, leaving pedagogical gaps in undergraduate nursing programs.

Pedagogical preparation and specific qualifications focused on teaching practice are, therefore, essential for these educators. There is a clear need for ongoing professional development programs designed to strengthen nurse educators' pedagogical competencies. Such programs should be comprehensive and flexible, enabling educators to incorporate new teaching strategies and use educational technologies effectively.

It is essential that higher education institutions recognize and respond to these needs by implementing curricular reforms that include more substantial pedagogical coursework in undergraduate nursing programs. They should also promote continuing education initiatives that support the development of teaching practice, ensuring that nurse educators are prepared to meet the challenges of contemporary teaching.

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Lorena Gleice Azevedo da Silva

Bachelor's degree in nursing from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Currently pursuing a postgraduate program in Nursing Auditing at Faculdade do Leste Mineiro (FACULESTE).

lgleice10@gmail.com

Karina Xavier de Lima

Bachelor's degree in nursing from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM).

kaxlima2000@gmail.com

Jéssica Karoline Alves Portugal

Bachelor's degree in nursing from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Assistant Professor in the Nursing Program at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Master's degree in nursing from the State University of Pará and the Federal University of Amazonas (UEPA/UFAM).

jessica.isb.ufam@gmail.com

Nair Chase da Silva

Bachelor's degree in nursing from the School of Nursing of Manaus (Escola de Enfermagem de Manaus, EEM). Full Professor at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Master's degree in education from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Doctorate in Public Health from the Sergio Arouca National School of Public Health, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (ENSP/FIOCRUZ). Postdoctoral fellowship in Nursing at the Nursing School of Coimbra, Portugal.

nairchase@yahoo.com.br

Hyana Kamila Ferreira de Oliveira

Bachelor's degree in nursing from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Associate Professor in the Nursing Program at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Master's degree in nursing from the State University of Pará and the Federal University of Amazonas (UEPA/UFAM). Doctoral student in Nursing at the State University of Pará and the Federal University of Amazonas (UEPA/UFAM).

hyanakamila@ufam.edu.br

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