

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION AND THE MEANING OF LIFE IN NURSING CARE: PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

A DIMENSÃO ESPIRITUAL E SENTIDO DA VIDA NA PRÁTICA DO CUIDADO DE ENFERMAGEM: ENFOQUE FENOMENOLÓGICO

LA DIMENSIÓN ESPIRITUAL Y EL SENTIDO DE LA VIDA EN LA PRÁCTICA DE LOS CUIDADOS DE ENFERMERÍA: ENFOQUE FENOMENOLÓGICO

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ABSTRACT

To reflect on the inference of the spiritual dimension and the meaning of life in nursing care provided to patients. It is a reflective study on nursing care, centered on the spiritual dimension and the meaning of life, based on existential phenomenological presuppositions. The articulation of the study with phenomenology made it possible to understand that care, as a phenomenon of nursing, occurs in a world of experiences and intersubjective experiences and that the awakening of consciousness through values, motivates the meaning of life, besides making it possible to care of several purposes and meanings for existence. It is concluded that care centered on the meaning of life based on the spiritual dimension, enables the nursing professional to open for interior transformation, personal development and consequently improvement of their care actions in a humane, holistic, integral and, above all, ethical way.

Keywords: Spirituality; Existentialism; Life; Nursing Care; Professional Practice.

RESUMO

Refletir sobre a inferência da dimensão espiritual e o sentido da vida na prática do cuidado de Enfermagem prestado aos pacientes. Trata-se de estudo reflexivo sobre o cuidado de Enfermagem, centrado na dimensão espiritual e sentido da vida, pautado em pressupostos fenomenológicos existenciais. A articulação do estudo com a fenomenologia possibilitou compreender que o cuidado, como fenômeno da Enfermagem, ocorre em um mundo de vivências e experiências intersubjetivas e que o despertar da consciência por meio de valores motiva o sentido da vida, além de possibilitar ao cuidar um leque de possibilidades de propósitos e significados para a existência. Concluiu-se que o cuidado centrado no sentido da vida tendo como alicerce a dimensão espiritual possibilita ao profissional de Enfermagem abertura para transformação interior, desenvolvimento pessoal e, conseqüentemente, aprimoramento de suas ações de cuidado de maneira humana, holística, integral e, sobretudo, ética.

Palavras-chave: Espiritualidade; Existencialismo; Vida; Cuidados de Enfermagem; Prática Profissional.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio busca reflexionar sobre la inferencia de la dimensión espiritual y el sentido de la vida en la práctica de los cuidados de enfermería. Se trata de un estudio reflexivo sobre el cuidado de enfermería centrado en la dimensión espiritual y el sentido de la vida, en base a los presupuestos fenomenológicos existenciales. La articulación del estudio con la fenomenología permitió comprender que el cuidado, como fenómeno de enfermería, ocurre en un mundo de vivencias y experiencias intersubjetivas y que el despertar de la conciencia por medio de valores motiva el sentido de la vida, más allá de permitir que al cuidar se abra una gama de posibilidades de propósitos y significados para la existencia. Se concluye que el cuidado centrado en el sentido de la vida, teniendo como base la dimensión espiritual, le permite al profesional de enfermería abrirse para la transformación interior, desarrollo personal y, por consiguiente, perfeccionar sus acciones de cuidados de manera humana, holística, integral y, sobre todo, ética.

Palabras clave: Espiritualidad; Existencialismo; Vida; Atención de Enfermería; Práctica Profesional.

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INTRODUCTION

The nursing profession implies an ethical alliance with society in the support of human care with the perspective of preserving the dignity and oneness of the human being in its totality.

The care considered characteristic of predominance in nursing actions from the point of view in the phenomenological field is understood as a way of being and in this affirmation confers the condition of humanity to the people.¹ In this foundation, the human being lives the meaning of his own life through care as he goes through the deep paths that surround his existence.²

As part of a subjective dimension, caring involves the way man exists in his innermost essence through the relationship of being with himself and with others in the world of life that surrounds them.³ Thus, through the ontological characteristics of human existence, care occupies a sense of possibilities, which goes beyond the act and of what can be perceived.⁴ Caring is expressed, therefore, by the relation of interest to the other and to the other within a world characterized by the way the individual acts, feels and thinks about his or her neighbor, since it represents an intentional being according to phenomenology.⁵

It is in this intentionality that caring receives a more sensitive connotation, to be perceived, thought, expressed and shared in a trajectory of intersubjectivity.⁶ In this context, through intersubjectivity, the world view of the being who is cared for interconnects with the view of the being that cares and both bodies, from the coexistence³, draw from this connection a unique and original relationship full of meanings.

Thus, it is not possible to think of care only as theorization of knowledge, application of techniques and instrumentalization of equipment. Caring is also composed of the vision of the world of each one, of the experiences in the ways of living, of being and of expressing oneself,⁴ in the sense of favoring the potentialities of people and keeping the human condition in balance in all dimensions of human existence.

In this understanding, the meaning of the care provided by the nursing professional is manifested based on values, emotions, feelings, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes, in a condition of interrelation with other individuals and with things in the world in which it is inserted.² In this area, escaping any ontic reduction, man is not only capable of objectifying and explanatory reach, he is attained and capable of experiencing and unveiling senses when he is understood as a spiritual being.

In this approach, the spiritual is understood as a specifically human dimension, not related to something sacred or religious, but with something that allows man to exercise his capacity for oneness and search for the meaning of life.⁷

Thus, the study aims to reflect on the inference of spirituality and the meaning of life in the practice of nursing care provided to patients, bringing a look of care beyond the physical body, but also the metaphysical. In this perspective it is implicit

the understanding of the meaning of life and the capacity to understand oneself and the other, having the spiritual dimension as a foundation. The perspective is that the experiential values attributed to these professionals culminate in the care and unfolding of the senses.

Based on these premises, the study aims to foster discussions and reflections on this subject in the scientific field, so that in the scope of care the nursing professional can be considered an opening of the senses and through the values acquired in their existence they can perform their practice in a humanistic, holistic and integral way, and above all, ethical.

BASES OF THE MEANING OF LIFE AND THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

The human being, in his most intimate essence, seeks to understand life and to find a lasting sense for their existence. In this way, when speaking about "meaning" allusion is made to the purpose and coherence of the reason for being in the world. In this non-exhaustive variety of meanings of the term "sense", in the phenomenological view, an articulation is made with the existentialist theory of Viktor Frankl, which purpose is to lead man to find the meaning of life.⁸

This strand brings the view of the person as an existing being, with great potential to be realized especially through the experience and not from something that is prefixed. In this perspective, the meaning of life is what moves human existence, being considered a source of primary motivation and that drives man to direct his life to fulfillment.⁹ Thus, the meaning of life is the direction that man can take in discovering its meaning, considering his freedom and responsibility before life.⁸

In fact, man, being free, emphasizes his unique and irreplaceable character by the ability to self-determine in any situation. He is the one who chooses to be and the encounter of the meaning of his existence is evidenced by establishing the knowledge of himself through the search for insights and discoveries. Thus, by the circumstances present in his daily life, man has the freedom to effect his position in the world and, consequently, to assume in a conscious and responsible way the choices made.

In this way, the meaning of life is universal in its value and individual in its content taken by intentionality, with the purpose of establishing its existence in the world.¹⁰ This intentionality is embedded in the consciousness of the person to his existence in which it is the matrix of the world of meanings.

Considering the above, the meaning of life can only be reached from the world of life, which is sedimented by the different ways in which man lives and is related in a certain sociocultural environment and inserted in a scenario of defined space and time.

Thus, in the ontological perspective, the dimension that duly contemplates the human being, being filled with concrete values and meanings and allowing the validation of his freedom, responsibility and conscience, is the spiritual dimension. This dimension intimately enables man to attain the essence of existence, to reveal what constitutes his specific reality and to find the purpose and the meaning of his life. In it, man operates in an existential reality, present in the creative and re-creating moment of himself in his relation to the world,¹⁰ letting it show what constitutes his specific reality.

The spiritual dimension as the foundation of the meaning of life allows the unfolding of meaning, characterizing man as possibilities and capable of achieving self-transcendence.⁷ As a constitutive characteristic of human existence, self-transcendence refers to the authenticity of human existence on the premise that man establishes a detachment from himself, going beyond himself in search of self-realization and meaning.^{7,9}

This position of detachment proclaims that the preponderant interest of man is based on something, something or someone other than himself, determining the viability of the meeting of his life. In this perspective, the contents of the senses are awakened to the extent that they can achieve something conducive to personal fulfillment and are therefore anchored from three categories of values: creative, experiential and attitudinal.⁸

Creative values correspond to a man's ability to discover that he can offer something to the world, through a task or a work.^{8,11} Thus, the human being is able to reach its fullness when in his contribution he expresses his oneness and way of being.

The experiential value is related to surrendering to the experience of something, in which man discovers that, in addition to giving, he can receive something from the world.¹¹ Such value can be derived from the experience of goodness, truth, beauty, nature, culture, as well as from experience with another being in his own originality, by love. In fact, this value is realized based on a vital experience, in which a single moment can have repercussions throughout life.

The attitudinal value emerges when man is forced by his unalterable fate to take a stand in the face of some circumstance that cannot be changed.^{8,9} It is the ability to turn an adverse situation into triumph, personal fulfillment, or self-change.

Thus, the significant content of human existence is based on values based on the premise that the life of man ceases to have abstract meaning when a specific vocation is discovered, engaged in the execution of a concrete task, forgets himself in the service of a cause or when one experience the other human being in his own originality through love.^{8,12}

In this sense, starting from the premise that life has a purpose to fulfill, these values correspond to being the driving force for man to turn to something deep, true and meaningful in his life, not something temporary that gives him pleasure or power.

In this way, the meaning of life, as the full expression of the spiritual dimension, is directly related to the values of each being and from them one can find a significant content for existence.

NURSING FOCUSED ON SENSE: A NEW APPROACH TO PRACTICE

Care is the oldest practice of mankind and accompanies the human being since his genesis. It is intrinsic to man and the fundamental constituent of his existence. It is part of the essence of being and, as an integral part of life, allows the encounter between human beings as a thread to personal development.

In this sense, the notion of care can be taken in a broad, ontic and ontological sense.¹³ Referring to the ontic sense, it relates to the act itself immediately. It implies a concrete and determined direction of reality for something or someone as a matter of interest or concern.¹ It is characterized by behaviors and attitudes manifested by the daily life of the profession with the development of techniques and procedures, as well as the follow-up of established norms and routines. Thus, care in relating to the concrete of reality manifests itself through the meanings of zeal, care, attention, diligence, solicitude, caution and responsibility.

In the ontological sense, care refers to the authenticity of the essence of each being in its concreteness, being underlying everything that is manifest.¹³ It concerns a meaning that goes beyond the act and which manifests itself primarily and originally to the ontic manifestation. It expresses itself, therefore, by the different possibilities of action in relation to the other beyond what it can perceive.

In this perspective, care is a dimension that contemplates deeper ways that involve human existence. It is recognized as something that is ahead of itself, intertwined in the ways of being and being in the world and that brings man back to his totality. Thus, this possibility of openness with the world allows the coexistence of one being with the other and through this interrelationship, through this intersubjective experience, man extracts from care a meaningful life that transports him to an existence in a more authentic way.⁴

In nursing, care has as a background the intersubjective relationships that can be signified and re-signified through what is established between nursing professional and patient. Based on the assumption that caring actions are intertwined with ways of being in the world, in a dynamic of coexistence, the care taken is based on beliefs, values, desires, knowledge, perspectives, sensations and emotions that are constructed and shared with each other from this relationship.

Therefore, intersubjectivity gives the visibility of intentionality, making care a relational process, of alterity, besides being placed as dynamic and temporal.⁶ In fact, the intentionality of consciousness manifests itself in a genuine way to each experi-

ence lived by the nursing professional, thus enabling a horizon of meanings and, consequently, an ontological horizon.

The sense is condemned to the intersubjectivity that is realized by means of the intersection and gearing of the subjective experiences of one being with those of the other. This inseparable act of subjectivity with intersubjectivity forms a unity of meaning, which is taken up by the experiences of the past and present of one being with the other and permeated by the relationship of intercorporeity.³ The body does not only refer to matter, but assumes the role of mediator between consciousness and the world, being simultaneously the subject of sensation, perception, feeling, thought.¹⁴ Thus, nursing care is in a relationship of intersubjectivity, driven by values, creative, experiential and/or attitudinal.

In this understanding, the relationship of the nursing professional with the patient in the world of care enables the understanding of facts, the openness to inner transformation, as well as new potentialities and possibilities of transcendence.

In this perception, care as a nursing phenomenon takes place in a life-world of experiences and reciprocity, which goes beyond the meaning of therapeutical techniques based on science. It is a care that is beyond what is perceptible to the eye and encompasses dimensions of uniqueness and plurality, such as: life histories, social, historical, cultural, economic and spiritual contexts.²

The exercise of caring opens a range of possibilities of senses, since the nursing professional inserted in the care lives his reality and his daily life with interferences of the lived experiences and the values attributed to these experiences with his peer in an intersubjective, intercorporeal and spiritual dimension.

The awakening of consciousness through values opens paths for the nursing professional to understand their particular mission or vocation and that through the task performed, above all, accomplishes and meets the meaning of life.¹¹ Values, in turn, should not be mistaken as meanings but rather as those factors that help to understand the concrete meaning of a particular situation.

Values represent the main way for the nursing professional to walk a life full of senses, which favors the motivation for an ethical attitude towards self and others in the act of caring, improving their health actions, and unleashing a potential of rediscovering himself with the enhancement of his being and inner development as an opening to his own transcendence.

Thus, care cannot be seen only as a task or activity with reduction of the world and of life, but as an ethical, aesthetic and poetic attitude that involves aspects of one's self, of one's relationship with others and with the world.⁴ Therefore, when performing care, the nursing professional has the possibility to keep the channels of his spiritual dimension open so that the care awakens content of senses and permanent personal development and self-understanding as a way of being to reach its transcendence.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Nursing care constitutes the essence of the profession and in the phenomenological-existentialist view occupies a position of possibilities. Therefore, for care to be constructed in a profitable way, it becomes necessary to understand what it means and in what way it brings meaning to the life of the nursing professional.

In this sense, from the expression of intentionality, the nursing professional guides his consciousness to transcendence, by the unfolding of the senses. However, this movement is permeated by the subjective and intersubjective experience between the professional and the patient, which at each moment experienced through care, allows the knowledge and recognition of oneself and expansion of the field of its values as a primary motivation for the rescue of the true essence and direction of the meaning of your life.

From this perspective, the meaning of life centered on care is based on the spiritual dimension. From this point of view, the act of caring cannot be considered only as a task anchored in the biologicist vision attached to the act itself, but as a sense of positioning itself in the world, unifying its consciousness to the rescue of the true essence of being, with a view to development personal and existential encounter.

Therefore, this study aims to provide the nursing professional with conditions of awareness and development of critical and reflexive skills on the subject by extending the space of discussion between the binomial "spirituality" and "meaning of life" reflecting their professional practice. And through this knowledge he can find a meaning and purpose as basic motivations to the peculiar role that is played, as well as being able to develop attitudes and senses in caring, in an essentially effective, human, integral and quality, especially a life with meaning.

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