



VOLUNTARY WORK FOR THE NEWLY GRADUATED NURSE: STRATEGY FOR INSERTION IN THE LABOR MARKET¹

Ana Cleide Soares Victor*
Maria Izabel Sampaio Carmagnani**
Luiza Hiromi Tanaka***

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The search for insertion in the labor market by the newly graduated nurse subjects her/him to complex situations at the beginning of career, related to the demand for experience and competitiveness in the current nursing scenario. **Objective:** To understand the meaning attributed to the experience of volunteering by newly graduated nurses, at the beginning of their careers. **Method:** Qualitative study conducted through interviews with 20 nurses who volunteered at a university hospital. Symbolic Interactionism was adopted as a theoretical framework and, the Content Analysis as a methodological framework were used. **Results:** For the volunteer nurse, the professional experience required by the labor market and the high competition to job openings were the elements that made this experience difficult, as a result of poor training and the increasing numbers of undergraduate nursing courses. **Final considerations:** Exercising voluntary work allows the interaction of theoretical and practical knowledge that was not fully mastered during nursing school, as well as working as a tool for formalizing professional experience for hiring.

Keywords: Nursing. Volunteers. Job market. Education, Nursing.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the professional trajectory of newly graduated nurses has grown gradually in recent years⁽¹⁾. The perceptions and experiences lived by the newly graduated nurse allow to evaluate the contributions of teaching, in line with the reality of the work, and to identify the difficulties found in this process of insertion in the job market that can be experienced by this professional⁽¹⁻²⁾.

In the search for insertion in the labor market, newly graduated nurses face complex situations, such as the requirement of employers for trained and qualified professionals and the high competitiveness for job openings⁽³⁾. As a consequence, the newly graduated nurse compares the demands of the job market with the skills acquired in his training and shows that the undergraduate program did not provide skills for the current requirements of the world of work⁽⁴⁾. Still, with the high number of newly graduates launched in the labor market, many professionals, without any employment

relationship, accept forms of work and precarious wages, resulting in the growth of informal employment and income stagnation⁽⁵⁾.

Faced with complex situations, graduated nurses feel challenged to seek new ways of obtaining knowledge and competitive advantage for a professional positioning⁽⁶⁾. Voluntary work for nurses is one way, as it allows achieving competencies and skills required for the work performance, complementary to the learning offered at graduation, through supervised professional practice regulated according to Federal Law 9,608 9⁽⁷⁾. Such assignment does not guarantee employment, social security or similar obligations.

The theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism was chosen. It constitutes a theoretical perspective that makes it possible to understand how individuals interpret objects and other people with whom they interact and how such an interpretation process leads to individual behavior in specific situations⁽⁸⁾, such as that experienced by nurses in beginning of his/her career.

¹This article is part of the doctoral thesis: Voluntary work: the search for the interaction of theoretical and practical knowledge by nursing graduates for insertion in the labor market, presented to the Graduate Nursing Program at Escola Paulista de Enfermagem, Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP), in 2015.

*Nurse. Doctor of Nursing, Hospital Universitário Regional de Maringá, Maringá, PR, Brazil. E-mail: acsvictor@uem.br. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9639-1402>.

**Nurse. Doctor of Nursing in Human Communication Disorders, Associate Professor and Researcher at the Graduate Program at EPE/UNIFESP. São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: carmagnani@unifesp.br. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5816-8207>

***Nurse. Doctor of Nursing, Researcher at the Graduate Program at EPE/UNIFESP. São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: simplesmenteluizinha@yahoo.com.br. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4344-1116>

Considering that the current evidence indicates that the voluntary nursing service is justified in the acquisition of skills necessary to meet the requirements inherent to the profession, and it also represents a curricular differential in the competitive labor market. In view of a gap in the scientific production of nursing addressing this theme, the present study sought to understand the meaning attributed by the newly graduated nurse to the experience of volunteering at the beginning of his career.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study, based on Symbolic Interactionism, which is based on the idea that human action is mediated according to the meanings attributed to things and how these meanings are related to life experiences⁽⁸⁾. In line with the chosen theoretical framework, qualitative content analysis with a conventional approach was arranged as a relevant methodological framework, since it is used to describe and promote the knowledge and understanding of a certain phenomenon, when the literature about it is scarce⁽⁹⁾.

The setting was a reference university hospital in the northern region of the State of Paraná. A total of twenty nurses participated in the investigation, 13 from private teaching institutions and seven from public institutions, who volunteered and were identified from the Voluntary work of Nursing Direction of the *Hospital Universitário Regional de Maringá* (HURM). The sample was obtained by data saturation, obeying the following inclusion criteria: nurses who exercised at least 6 months of voluntary work and who were and/or were settled in the labor market.

Data collection took place from August to September 2014, through a semi-structured interview, with the following guiding questions: "Tell me about the decision process to work in the voluntary work. How was your experience working as a volunteer?". The interviews were recorded, after participants' authorization, using digital media with an average duration of 30 minutes. To guarantee their anonymity, they were identified by the letters "VN" (volunteer nurse), followed by the order number of the interviews.

The speeches were transcribed in full, then submitted to analysis according to the precepts of Content Analysis⁽⁹⁾, constituting representative categories of the studied phenomenon. The study followed the formal ethical requirements from the national and international regulatory standards for research involving human beings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis allowed for the understanding of the meanings attributed by nurses who had the experience of exercising voluntary work at the beginning of their careers. The dimensions of this experience were presented in the following categories: Experiencing difficulties in interacting with the labor market; Thinking about strategies to enter the job market; Exercising voluntary work; Acknowledging the experience of voluntary work.

Experiencing difficulties in interacting with the labor market

For the volunteer nurse, the search to assure a place in the work world at the beginning of professional career was a challenging event, permeated by the difficulties experienced in the interaction with the labor market. One of the elements that made this experience difficult was the lack of the required professional experience, considering that, during his career in handing out resumes, he/she observed that the hiring was always for experienced professionals.

I left college and started looking for a job, without success! About 3 to 4 months looking for a job [...]. I went through many interviews, but it didn't work, I did selective tests, examinations, interviews [...] the requirement was experience. (VN9) Usually, people look for nurses with experience and, as I was recently graduated, it was very difficult. (VN17)

In fact, several difficulties faced in becoming hired are related to the demand for experience determined by the job market. This aspect has been evidenced in the literature, highlighting that the nurse's job market is increasingly demanding and complex, as it is a field influenced by social, political, economic factors and technological and scientific advances. Qualified professionals who

meet the profile based on competences with evidence at the scientific level, ability for innovation and power of action are required⁽¹⁰⁻¹¹⁾.

In addition to the experience required by the job market, the volunteer nurse had been looking for a first job aware of the competition. They mentioned that, due to the increase in the number of undergraduate nursing courses, the quantity of professionals launched in the job market increased, causing greater competitiveness by the job openings.

We know that it will not be easy to get a job. Today there are several nursing courses, lot of recently graduated nurses and you will compete with that, for sure. (VN5)

There is a great competition and more nurses are popping up every year, so it gets worse. (VN20)

The increase in the number of nursing courses is evident. In the last decades, there has been a considerable increase in the offer of undergraduate nursing courses. From 2007 to 2017, there was an increase of 52% and, in 2017, 955 institutions and higher education courses in nursing in Brazil were registered with the Ministry of Education⁽¹²⁾.

If, on the one hand, this increase is recognized as a positive phenomenon, with the advantages of democratizing access to higher education, greater availability of professionals in the market and adherence to the population's health demands, on the other hand, the random opening of new courses have some negative consequences. As examples, the geographical inequality in the distribution of these courses and the greater number of professionals to be absorbed by the labor market, pointing that there is a tendency for unemployment, labor informality and income stagnation, in addition to the non-guarantee of the minimum quality standards for training^(5,13).

Since she did not have the professional experience required by the job market, and knowing the competition between the categories, in the volunteer nurse's perception, this lack of professional experience was related to her training, a consequence of 'a lot' of theoretical classes and 'little' practice, resulting insufficient procedures performed and feelings of fear for professional practice. In her perception, there should be more clinicals to provide an opportunity to experience reality as it is. She

assessed, then, that the graduation did not offer skills according to the demands of the job market.

Whether we like it or not, we get out of college unprepared [...] unfortunately everyone I talk to, every recently graduated, says this to me: "I don't feel prepared [...] I feel that there are procedures that I didn't perform in college, I feel like I'm not ready." (VN 8).

I think, like everyone else, we get out of college somewhat unprepared, you know [...] you are afraid of everything [...] I think that there had to be more clinicals, more practice, to live the reality as it is [...]. we see a lot of theory, theory ... and then the practice is different. (VN 3)

The lack of opportunities in the internships in undergraduate school, often, does not allow the student to watch or have the chance to perform all the techniques. In this way, students conclude finish the undergraduate course, carrying along many doubts and insecurities, caused by little experience⁽¹⁴⁾. Undergraduate practice should provide students with a reflection on professional action and criticism, supported by supervision, as a dynamic and creative process, to enable the development of new knowledge⁽¹⁵⁾.

Thinking about strategies to enter the job market

From the difficulties experienced in the interaction with the labor market, the volunteer nurse understood the need to act on behalf of herself, when thinking about strategies for her insertion in the labor market. The hiring limitations led her to look for ways to add experiences for her professional development.

The refusals were a 'push' to keep up. You see that something is missing, so you after additional things. (VN 4)

I needed to have experience to achieve something, to go after an attribute. (VN 5)

In this search, through social interaction, the volunteer nurse became aware of the voluntary work, understood as a proposal that favored the acquisition of skills for professional development and that served as a facilitator for insertion in the job market.

What led me to look for the volunteer work was to seek for knowledge that only practice will give

me. The book could give me, but practicing it I would better know, develop, and learn. (VN 6)

When I was told about volunteering for nurses at the university hospital, I was very excited. Because, in addition to gaining practical experience, I was sure that later it would be easier to find a job. (VN 12)

Symbolic Interactionism assumes that human action is mediated according to the meanings attributed to the interactions experienced, and the individual's action starts to be guided by this meaning⁽⁸⁾. In this way, the meaning of experiencing difficulties to be in the labor market is expressed in the motivation to seek a differential that meets the demands of the world of work. In line with this result, studies^(6,15) revealed that nursing graduates feel encouraged to strengthen their knowledge in the face of obstacles, becoming aware of the importance of continuing education as a tool for new possibilities in the job market.

Exercising voluntary work

Voluntary work is a challenging path for the volunteer nurse. Amid the expectation of the opportunity to develop skills to achieve professional goals, the nurse, at the same time, feared for taking on new responsibilities and new demands for attitudes and skills. Initially, the volunteer nurse was afraid to work at the specialty unit and referred as reasons, the inexperience and interactions lived at graduation with the specialty, which had not been positive, originating symbols manifested in feelings of insecurity and fear.

When I started volunteering, I was feeling very insecure... the Gynecology and Obstetrics clinicals at the college was very poor. So, the essentials I had no confidence perform. (VN 16)

The expectation was so great to work in the emergency room, that I felt happy and at the same time panicked. I wondered: will I be able to learn anything? (VN 10)

Usually, there is no option of choosing a specialty for the newly graduated person, nor the unit where he/she should work within a health service. The conflict is then experienced by the newly graduated nurse and manifested by the antagonism of the generalist guidelines of the

undergraduate course, confronted with the organization of health services, specifically in the hospital area, which has the specialties as direction. It is common for a recent graduate to work in areas of specialty without technical skills and, at first sight, the new and specific requirements are not coincident with the experiences of the undergraduate, both in terms of theoretical and practical knowledge⁽¹⁶⁾. This condition was also highlighted in another study in which newly graduated nurses expressed feeling insecurity, anxiety and even anguish when providing care to patients in units of greater complexity⁽⁶⁾.

In this specialty adaptation scenario, consequently the interaction with the multidisciplinary team from the specialized sector was evidenced. When the environment was hampered by interpersonal relationship issues, the volunteer nurse revealed her anguish, which referred to the feeling of frustration and rejection, triggering crying reactions, the will to abandon the scene and giving up voluntary work.

At first it was very difficult, I had a lot of relationship problems. The biggest problem was with the nurses, oddly enough [...], they knew I needed this experience, they treated me like I was a nursing assistant working for them [...], I felt like running out, I cried, I would go to the bathroom and cried right there. (VN 8)

Dealing with the human being, with the team, is much harder than with work itself or the patient. Some nurses and technicians did not accept me in a general context. Because they are people who have been there for a long time, right. People who already have their space, their way of working and are often not open to suggestions nor to explain anything. (VN 10)

One of the main difficulties faced by newly nursing graduates is their acceptance by the members of the nursing team, caused especially by the lack of experience, generating resistance to the figure of the recent graduate due to distrust of his/her training for the professional role⁽¹⁷⁻¹⁸⁾. In an investigation of the challenges faced by nurses at the beginning of the career, it was found that, to have the team's trust and credibility, commitment, patience, dedication and skill were required⁽¹⁰⁾.

In view of the hostility, the volunteer nurse attributed meanings to such interactions, starting to act based on this meaning. Gave self-advice, considering and prioritizing his/her needs, and decided to remain in voluntary work. For such, developed strategies that could guarantee the achievement of his/her objectives in the voluntary work and adopted attitudes that symbolized the overcoming of the difficulties experienced.

I said to myself: I will not give up, because I need to, I want to become experienced. I knew it was important to me. After about 2 months I started to get more confidence, and then they changed their attitudes with me a little. (VN 8)

So, part of the team accepts you, the other part doesn't. So, you must get around it. Because I am not formally hired in the service, I preferred not to act on that, I preferred to distance myself from some people. Because, whether I like it or not, I needed this experience with them, both with nurses and technicians (VN 10)

I tried to do everything to please. I first followed the technicians [...] I spent a period playing the role of technician. I really showed that I learned, that was my attitude to guarantee my spot. If I cross my arms and expect assignments as a nurse, only as a nurse, I would be rejected. (VN 6)

Acceptance in the team, as a professional, is pointed out as a goal to be achieved by the new nurse. The search for integration, being part of and being seen as a member of the team, is often based on demonstrating the effectiveness of their technical abilities and skills with the team, seeking to impress and gain confidence and recognition⁽¹⁹⁻²⁰⁾.

Consequently, the activities carried out in the voluntary work were both assistance and administrative, with assistance predominating. For the difficulties experienced in volunteering, some nurses justified by the lack of experiences in college.

I had greater difficulty in medication dilution, regardless of how 'silly' it may be. Regarding children, I never dealt with pediatric medication, such as triple dosages and counting equipment volume. When I did an internship in pediatrics at college, it was that basic thing: talking to the kids, interacting with the parents [...] the medication dilution was the most difficult part until I learned well. (VN 5)

When I did my internship in the operating room and in the sterilization central service, I saw just about nothing, then I got there and they threw that bunch of tools with those beautiful names at me... (lol) Then, until you got used to it, starting to assimilate a name with the tool, that pile of material, oxide material [...] so, at first I had difficulties, but then I got the hang of it. (VN 19)

There were many new things that I didn't see undergraduate school, some types of pregnancy pathologies [...] and, then, when I showed up, I was going to research, because I didn't know what it was and had never seen it, then I would research about it, and the next day I would know what it was. (VN 16)

The possible causes of the remaining difficulties when starting the career are due to the insufficient opportunities in the clinicals during undergraduate school, either because of the scarce demand of procedures or the precarious situation of the fields of practice⁽⁴⁾.

We can discuss that, in general, the units that carry out the internships (hospitals and health units) are affected by the deficiencies that the Brazilian public sector goes through. The facilities and equipment are precarious, and there is a shortage of professionals, in quantitative and qualitative terms. Such conditions interfere and impair most fields for students' practice⁽²⁰⁾.

Acknowledging the experience of voluntary work

Doing voluntary work for nurses at the beginning of their career meant the possibility of the interaction of theoretical and practical knowledge that had not been fully mastered during undergraduate school. As well, it worked as a tool for formalizing professional experience to get hired.

The unit in which I volunteered, the emergency room, you get more practice, you can understand the patient better, the patient's illness, things that we don't learn in college, to have a clinical eye. (VN 1)

As a volunteer, I proved the required experience, not to mention the confidence I acquired to take my first job, especially the in carrying out procedures, discussing pathologies, mediating moments of conflict, it was very good.. (VN 12)

Volunteering was an opportunity to get to know the reality of the profession and technical

improvement, which favored entering the job market. (VN 13)

Direct contact with reality, based on the opportunity to develop essential skills in all dimensions of human care and in the different contexts of the nursing work process, provides the professional with the ability to meet the requirements for insertion in the labor market. Extracurricular clinicals are considered as a means of addressing the difficulties found during training and promoting non-opportune experiences during academic activities. Also, skills focused on practice are developed and improved, besides adding advantages to the curriculum, favoring entering the labor market⁽²¹⁻²²⁾.

The benefits of voluntary work pointed out by the interviewees emerged in criticisms of their training. They assessed that the undergraduate clinicals did not provide a scope of technical knowledge sufficiently capable of meeting the needs for scientific and practical training of nurses, resulting from the field deficiencies and the insufficient conditions of didactic procedures, both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Undergraduate school did not prepare me in practice, practice was missing. I took clinicals in horrible places, we had nothing to do there, we didn't have the practice, the real experience. Thanks to God, by volunteering I had people who helped me with the procedures, because most of the invasive procedures I only saw in theory. (VN 7)

My internships were very bad. The only thing performed was an injection, do a 'little puncture', when it was possible, because it was random, it was the seven of us, done by 'queue', for me it didn't meet the expectations. (VN 7)

The supervised curricular clinicals must be a very rich academic activity for professional training, as it is the moment in which the student experiences direct contact with the reality of the health of the population and the work universe, to enable personal and professional growth, and the consolidation of knowledge acquired during the course, through the theory-practice relationship^(3,23).

In the teaching of undergraduate nursing, generally, schools find it difficult to incorporate proposals to enhance the changes in the training

of professionals established by national curricular guidelines for nursing, especially those related to the acquisition, development and evaluation of skills and competences and of essential content skills, and practices/clinical^(14,21).

The challenge is to overcome the requirements of the curricular guidelines, training professionals who surpass the theoretical-practical domain required by the job market, as innovative agents of reality inserted and valued in the work universe⁽²⁴⁾.

In this perspective, it is essential that nursing schools adapt their curricula and pedagogical practices, and that curriculum reform is one of the ways for the necessary change in this training of nurses⁽²⁵⁾.

In this study, the volunteer nurse suggested strategies to improve the training of nurses, such as increasing the workload of internships and the need to include nursing residency as a reality that can be applied to the training process of specialists in the nursing and health areas. Because, in her perception, it would provide the nursing student to experience the reality for better interaction between theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as better placement in the job market.

It is too bad that in nursing it is not like medical school, which has a continuous internship. Because it builds the professional, you go there, in practice, take action and do it, I think it is fundamental. That is what is missing in the faculty of nursing. (VN 1)

Nursing could be like some other courses, such as law, for example, that they require internship at a law firm in undergraduate school. This would bring an opportunity for the nursing students, they would feel the reality. I think this would be an experience to enable them for the job market. (VN 14)

As a recommendation for the applicability of this research, it is proposed to transform the curricula of undergraduate nursing courses, which implies enabling greater interaction between theoretical and practical knowledge. This transformation goes through the need for the future nursing professional to know the peculiarities of the market in which he/she wants to work and the search for the necessary

qualifications for the development of the professional profile.

We believe that such a transformation will allow better connection into the work universe, anticipating what future professionals will find. And, thus, preparing them for this transition and adapting them to new knowledge and new technological trends in nursing, assisting them in the development of skills defined as essential to be a successful professional.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study made enabled understanding that voluntary work, for nurses at the beginning of

their careers, meant the possibility of the interaction of theoretical and practical knowledge that had not been fully mastered during undergraduate school. It also, worked as a tool for formalizing professional experience for hiring.

It is noteworthy that the training of nurses requires changes that consider the real trends in the labor market, both in terms of the impact of hiring and in the need for better qualification in the training process. As a continuity, new research is suggested to make it allow identifying other ways of insertion in the labor market for recently graduated, in addition to what was analyzed here.

SERVIÇO VOLUNTÁRIO PARA O ENFERMEIRO RECÉM-FORMADO: ESTRATÉGIA PARA INSERÇÃO NO MERCADO DE TRABALHO

RESUMO

Introdução: A busca pela inserção no mercado de trabalho do egresso em enfermagem o coloca diante de situações complexas no início de sua vida profissional, relacionadas à exigência de experiência e competitividade no cenário atual da enfermagem. **Objetivo:** Compreender o significado atribuído pelo egresso de enfermagem à experiência de atuar como voluntário no início de carreira. **Método:** Estudo qualitativo realizado por meio de entrevistas com 20 enfermeiras que exerceram serviço voluntário em um hospital universitário. O Interacionismo Simbólico foi adotado como referencial teórico e, como referencial metodológico, utilizou-se a Análise de Conteúdo. **Resultados:** Para a enfermeira voluntária, a experiência profissional exigida pelo mercado de trabalho e a elevada concorrência por vaga de emprego foram os elementos que tornaram esta experiência difícil, em consequência de uma formação deficiente e do aumento da expansão dos cursos de graduação em enfermagem. **Considerações finais:** Exercer o serviço voluntário possibilita a interação de saberes teóricos e práticos que não foram totalmente dominados durante a graduação, bem como funciona como ferramenta de formalização de sua experiência profissional para empregabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Enfermagem. Voluntários. Mercado de Trabalho. Educação em Enfermagem.

SERVICIO VOLUNTARIO PARA EL ENFERMERO RECIÉN GRADUADO: ESTRATEGIA PARA INSERCIÓN EN EL MERCADO LABORAL

RESUMEN

Introducción: la busca por la inserción en el mercado laboral del enfermero recién graduado lo pone ante situaciones complejas en el inicio de su vida profesional, relacionadas a la exigencia de experiencia y competitividad en el escenario actual de la enfermería. **Objetivo:** comprender el significado dado por el egreso de enfermería a la experiencia de actuar como voluntario en el comienzo de la carrera. **Método:** estudio cualitativo realizado por medio de entrevistas con 20 enfermeras que prestaron servicio voluntario en un hospital universitario. El Interaccionismo Simbólico fue adoptado como referencial teórico y, como referencial metodológico, se utilizó el Análisis de Contenido. **Resultados:** para la enfermera voluntaria, la experiencia profesional exigida por el mercado laboral y la fuerte competencia por vacante de empleo fueron los elementos que volvieron esta experiencia difícil, como resultado de una formación deficiente y del aumento de la expansión de los cursos de pregrado en enfermería. **Consideraciones finales:** prestar servicio voluntario posibilita la interacción de saberes teóricos y prácticos que no fueron totalmente dominados durante el pregrado, así como funciona en cuanto herramienta de formalización de su experiencia profesional para empleabilidad.

Palabras clave: Enfermería. Voluntarios. Mercado de Trabajo. Educación en Enfermería.

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Corresponding author: Ana Cleide Soares Victor. Rua Professor Giampero Monacci, 402 apto 32, Jardim Novo Horizonte, CEP 87010-090, Maringá, PR, Brasil. Telefone: (44) 99922-2535 Email: acsvictor@uem.br

Submitted: 26/04/2019

Accepted: 18/06/2020