

Implications of hospital accreditation certification for nursing care and management

Implicações da certificação em acreditação hospitalar para a assistência e gestão em enfermagem

Implicaciones de la certificación de acreditación hospitalaria para la atención y la gestión de enfermería

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RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar as evidências disponíveis na literatura acerca das Implicações da certificação ONA em Acreditação Hospitalar para a assistência e gestão em Enfermagem. **Método:** trata-se de uma revisão integrativa realizada em seis bases de dados. A amostra foi composta por 23 estudos entre 2001 e 2024. A classificação do Nível de Evidência seguiu o modelo descrito por Melnyk e Fineout-Overholt. A qualidade metodológica foi avaliada por meio do Checklist PRISMA-2020. A análise e síntese dos dados foram realizadas de forma qualitativa e descritiva, respectivamente. **Resultados:** As implicações identificadas foram: organização das instituições acreditadas, padronização dos processos de assistência e gestão de enfermagem, e o desenvolvimento de habilidades e competências. No entanto, foi observada uma implicação negativa relacionada à motivação, ao estresse e à sobrecarga das equipes envolvidas no processo de acreditação. **Conclusão:** A implementação dos padrões ONA exigem uma padronização rigorosa dos processos, o que resulta em maior eficiência e segurança do paciente, promovendo a criação de indicadores de desempenho e efetividade, possibilitando monitoramento e melhoria das práticas clínicas e administrativas. Trazendo qualidade, e promovendo desenvolvimento profissional dos enfermeiros para a prestação do cuidado a população.

Descritores: Hospitais; Acreditação Hospitalar; Assistência de enfermagem; Gestão em enfermagem; Certificação.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze the available evidence in the literature regarding the implications of ONA certification in Hospital Accreditation for nursing care and management. **Method:** This is an integrative review conducted across six databases. The sample consisted of 23 studies published between 2001 and 2024. The classification of the Level of Evidence followed the model described by Melnyk and Fineout-Overholt. Methodological quality was assessed using the PRISMA-2020 Checklist. Data analysis and synthesis were carried out qualitatively and descriptively, respectively. **Results:** The identified implications included: organization of accredited institutions, standardization of nursing care and management processes, and the development of skills and competencies. However, a negative implication was observed, related to motivation, stress, and overload experienced by the teams involved in the accreditation process. **Conclusion:** The implementation of ONA standards requires rigorous standardization of processes, which leads to greater efficiency and patient safety. It promotes the creation of performance and effectiveness indicators, allowing for the monitoring and improvement of clinical and administrative practices. This enhances quality and fosters the professional development of nurses in delivering care to the population.

Descriptors: Hospitals; Hospital Accreditation; Nursing Care; Nursing Management; Certification.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar la evidencia disponible en la literatura sobre las implicaciones de la certificación ONA en la Acreditación Hospitalaria para la atención y la gestión en Enfermería. **Método:** Se trata de una revisión integrativa realizada en seis bases de datos. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 23 estudios publicados entre 2001 y 2024. La clasificación del Nivel de Evidencia siguió el modelo descrito por Melnyk y Fineout-Overholt. La calidad metodológica fue evaluada mediante la lista de verificación PRISMA-2020. El análisis y la síntesis de los datos se realizaron de forma cualitativa y descriptiva, respectivamente. **Resultados:** Las implicaciones identificadas fueron: organización de las instituciones acreditadas, estandarización de los procesos de atención y gestión de enfermería, y el desarrollo de habilidades y competencias. Sin embargo, se observó una implicación negativa relacionada con la motivación, el estrés y la sobrecarga de los equipos involucrados en el proceso de acreditación. **Conclusión:** La implementación de los estándares ONA exige una rigurosa estandarización de los procesos, lo que resulta en una mayor eficiencia y seguridad del paciente. Promueve la creación de indicadores de desempeño y efectividad, lo que permite el monitoreo y la mejora de las prácticas clínicas y administrativas. Esto aporta calidad y promueve el desarrollo profesional de los enfermeros para la prestación de cuidados a la población.

Descritores: Hospitales; Acreditación Hospitalaria; Atención de enfermería; Gestión en enfermería;

Introduction

It is widely recognized that nursing care and management play a relevant role both in healthcare institutions and in patients' lives. Nurses are deeply involved, carrying out visits, procedures, guidance, training, and coordination of the healthcare team in developing strategies for prevention and improvement of care ⁽¹⁾.

Improving health outcomes and patient well-being is essential to promote equity and user satisfaction within healthcare services. To achieve such excellence, it is necessary to overcome challenges such as implementing well-defined work processes and providing adequate training for healthcare professionals. Although continuing education is available, institutions such as hospitals adopt methodologies for continuous improvement and invest in these methods ⁽²⁾.

Healthcare institutions are driven by a commitment to patient safety, involving the implementation of rigorous care standards, best clinical practices, investment in professional training, and the establishment of protocols to ensure a safe and effective environment ⁽³⁾.

Quality in patient care is an ethical imperative that reflects patients' trust in healthcare institutions and results in improved health and quality of life for those who depend on these services ⁽⁴⁾.

Given the demands for quality in healthcare service delivery, a health institution accreditation program can guide policies that promote quality management in Brazil's healthcare system ⁽⁵⁾, improving the quality of services provided to the population. To achieve this, managers need to employ specific strategies to reach that goal.

The diversity of accrediting and certifying organizations in the healthcare sector reflects not only the breadth but also the quality of services provided by hospitals and clinics ⁽⁶⁾.

These entities are fundamental in validating proper functioning, ensuring the accuracy of provided information, and assessing the effectiveness of management practices adopted by these healthcare establishments. By obtaining recognition from one of these entities, organizations reinforce their credibility and demonstrate a solid commitment to excellence in the delivery of nursing care and healthcare service administration ⁽⁷⁾.

Brazil has 6,401 hospitals, of which 4,529 are private, and only 9.2% are accredited by some method ⁽⁸⁾.

Currently, the most widely adopted accreditations/certifications by hospitals in Brazil are: the Joint Commission International (JCI), with 49 accredited hospitals; the Accreditation Canada International (ACI), which has 137 accredited hospitals; and the Hospital Accreditation (HA) of the National Accreditation Organization (ONA), which has already certified more than 424 hospitals ⁽⁹⁾.

The ONA is officially recognized by the Ministry of Health as the entity responsible for the hospital quality assessment system in the country. This fact emphasizes the importance of using ONA guidelines as an essential resource for the dissertation in question ⁽⁹⁾.

In Brazil, ONA was officially established through Ordinance No. 1970, dated October 25, 2001, which granted it authorization to conduct the hospital accreditation process in the country. This approach represents a valuable management tool that provides means to achieve high standards of safety and quality in healthcare services. Certification may be granted by both national and international institutions, following a methodology aimed at promoting a culture of continuous improvement and excellence in both management and care (9-10).

Since the introduction of HA processes, there has been increased support for the Nursing Care Systematization (NCS) and for methodologies aimed at implementing the nursing process in hospital units, supported by a variety of quality indicators. Among these criteria, patient safety stands out as the primary element in the evaluation process. This growing movement is driven by the understanding that the application of such methodologies is essential for obtaining HA certifications (9-10-11).

It is essential that leaders and managers encourage the successful adoption of these policies and their incorporation into the daily routines of staff members. The objective is to seek improvements in the processes and procedures addressed by the institution, considering that the commitment to quality in hospitals is a collective responsibility. The hospital care team must be prepared to act collaboratively in order to provide the highest quality of care to the population (1-7-9).

A critical analysis of the evidence on ONA certification can contribute to academic and professional discussions, stimulate research in related areas, and promote the continuous improvement of quality in health, nursing care, and management. This research not only benefits patients and healthcare professionals but also offers important contributions to scientific knowledge and hospital practice, strengthening the commitment to quality and safety in healthcare delivery.

Therefore, the choice of this topic is justified by its importance for nursing practice as well as for the improvement of healthcare and science in general.

In light of the above, this study aims to analyze the available evidence in the literature regarding the implications of ONA certification in hospital accreditation for nursing care and management.

Method

Study design

This is an integrative literature review, which followed the following steps: formulation of the guiding question, search and selection of primary studies, evaluation of the primary studies, data analysis, and presentation of the review (12-13). The writing of the study followed the recommendations of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (14). *The protocol of this review was registered on Figshare, with the following Digital Object Identifier (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25091507.v1> (15).*

Period

The searches were conducted between June 2023 and August 2024.

Guiding question

What evidence is available in the literature regarding the implications of ONA certification in hospital accreditation for nursing care and management?

Eligibility criteria

The inclusion criteria were: primary studies related to the topic, focusing on the implications of ONA accreditation for nursing care and management, with a time frame between 2001 and 2024, and written in Portuguese, English, or Spanish. The exclusion criteria were: books, book chapters, experience reports, reflections, theoretical essays, reviews, letters, news articles, abstracts, and studies that did not answer the guiding question..

Search and Selection of Studies

To search for bibliographic references in databases, structured or controlled vocabularies were used, consisting of sets of standardized terms employed to index scientific publications. In searches conducted in the LILACS database, Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) were used, while in PubMed and Web of Science (WOS), the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) served as the controlled vocabulary. For the CINAHL database, the search for descriptors was conducted using the controlled vocabulary Subject Headings, and in the Embase database, descriptors were identified through the *Emtree* thesaurus.

The search for primary studies took place between July 20 and 25, 2025, in the following online databases: National Library of Medicine (PubMed), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL-Ebsco), Web of Science Core Collection, Embase, and Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS) via the Virtual Health Library (VHL). The databases were accessed free of charge through the Portal de Periódicos of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES). The selection of primary studies was carried out between August 1 and 30, 2024.

Initially, a preliminary survey on the topic was conducted to identify the main terms in Portuguese, English, and Spanish used as descriptors and keywords in the studies. Subsequently, the descriptors and keywords were defined according to the PICO strategy and the specificities of each database. Regarding the search strategy, advanced search was used with the Boolean operators OR and AND, respecting the particularities of the databases, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Descriptors used to develop the search strategy. Alfenas, MG, Brazil, 2024

LANGUAGE	STRATEGY
ENGLISH	"Hospitals" AND "Nursing care" AND "Hospital Accreditation"
PORTUGUESE	"Hospitais" AND "Cuidados de enfermagem" AND "Acreditação Hospitalar"
SPANISH	"Hospitales" AND "Atención Enfermería" AND "Acreditación de Hospitales"

After executing the search strategy in the mentioned databases, the initial selection was performed using the Endnote reference management software and the Rayyan Systems Inc. tool for initial screening of abstracts and titles (16-17).

The studies underwent a duplicate removal phase in Endnote first and were subsequently processed in Rayyan, where unresolved duplicates were again eliminated.

Data Collection

Data collection related to the characterization of the studies was carried out using an adapted data extraction form (18), extracting the following variables: title, author(s), degrees of the first and last authors, year of publication, journal, host institution, objective(s), methodological details (type/design, study site(s), population/sample/size/losses, inclusion/exclusion criteria, techniques for data collection and analysis), main results, study limitations, and conclusions.

This stage was conducted independently by two reviewers in August 2024. In cases of disagreement, a meeting was held to discuss and reach a consensus.

Data Processing and Analysis

The analysis and synthesis of the data followed a qualitative and descriptive approach, respectively. To classify the level of evidence (LE) of the studies, the model proposed by Melnyk and Fineout-Overholt (12) was used, which is divided into the following levels: Level I – Evidence from a systematic review or meta-analysis of all relevant randomized controlled trials (RCTs) or from clinical guidelines based on systematic reviews of RCTs; Level II – Evidence derived from at least one well-designed randomized controlled trial; Level III – Evidence obtained from well-designed clinical trials without randomization; Level IV – Evidence from well-designed cohort and case-control studies; Level V – Evidence from systematic reviews of descriptive and

qualitative studies; Level VI – Evidence derived from a single descriptive or qualitative study; e Level VII – Evidence from the opinion of authorities and/or reports of expert committees;

For methodological quality assessment/critical appraisal, the instruments proposed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) were used, considering the appropriate tools for each study design included. The instruments provided responses such as “yes,” “unclear,” “no,” or “not applicable”⁽¹⁹⁻²⁰⁾. The questions assess the internal validity and risk of bias of the studies.

Results

In Brazil, there has been increasing awareness regarding the importance of ensuring quality and safety in patient care.

Nursing plays a fundamental role in this accreditation process, given its management, care, and educational skills, contributing to the implementation of effective improvements in patient safety and care—also considering the changes and technological advancements affecting professionals in the field.

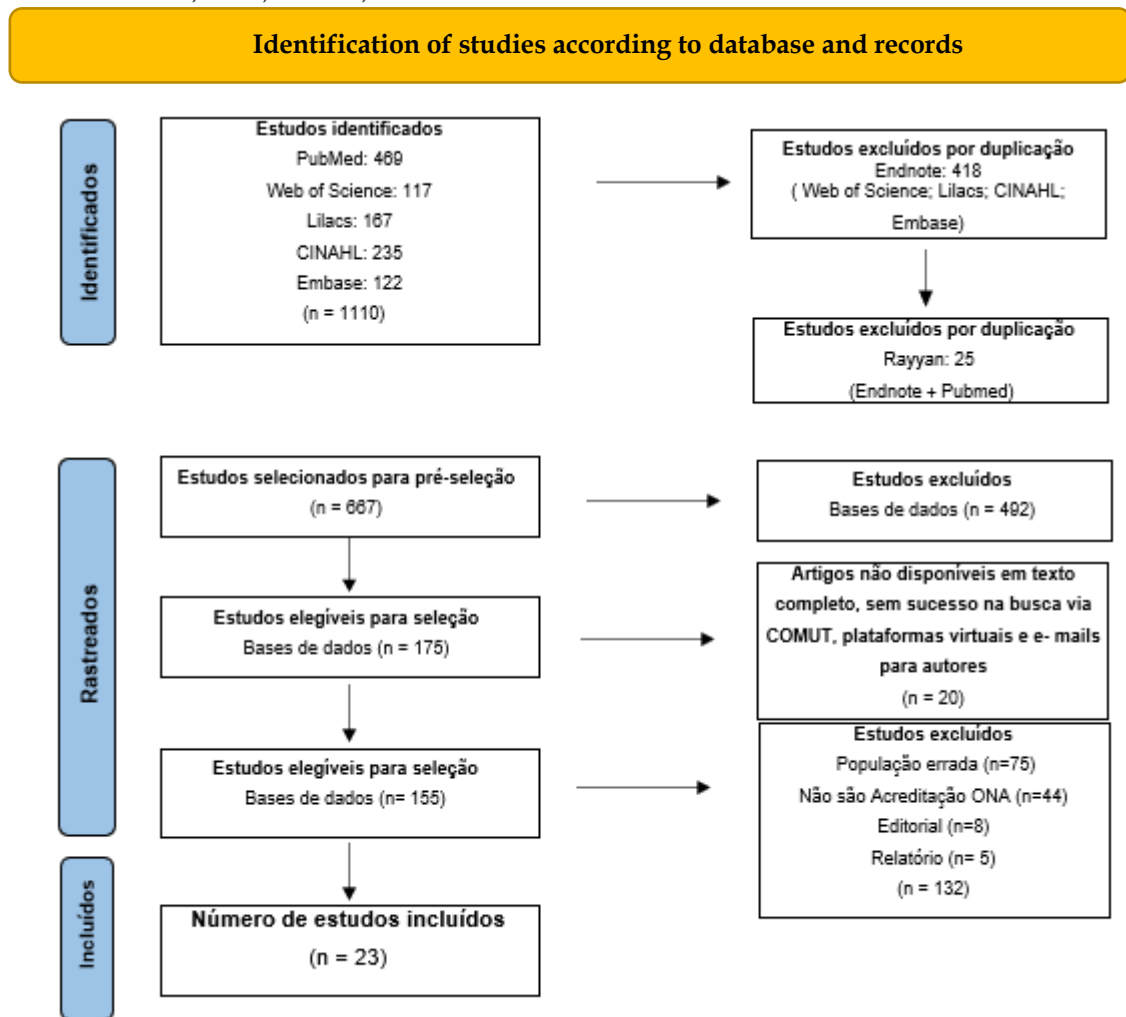
Hospital Accreditation is described as a systematic and dynamic process resulting in continuous improvements, with the involvement of both top management and professionals directly responsible for patient care being the foundation for the success of this process.

Through this study, it was observed that the implications of nursing care for daily health practices, when combined with Hospital Accreditation, reflect directly on the quality of institutional practices and routines, with benefits that go beyond what many professionals might expect.

Among the positive aspects, there was a significant improvement in the quality of care provided and greater organization in management processes, resulting in increased safety for both patients and healthcare professionals.

However, the studies also highlighted the need for greater involvement of the nursing team in accreditation processes, as well as the importance of continuous adjustments in practices to ensure the maintenance of quality standards required by certification. Conversely, a decrease in motivation and an increase in stress levels among nursing teams were observed during the evaluation processes—factors that may compromise success in obtaining and maintaining accreditation. Figure 1 presents the identification of studies according to database and records.

Figure 1. Flowchart of the selection of studies included in the integrative review. Alfenas, MG, Brazil, 2024.



All the studies analyzed were conducted in Brazil, using the ONA methodology, which is widely adopted by hospital institutions in the country and aligns with the objective of this study ⁽⁹⁾.

Among the analyzed studies, the state of Minas Gerais stands out with the highest number of publications (39.13%), followed by São Paulo (30.43%). In addition, Paraná also stands out with (17.39%), while Bahia and Amazonas each have one published article (4.35%).

Regarding the years of publication, it is noteworthy that although ONA began its activities in Brazil in 2001, the National Supplementary Health Agency (ANS) intensified the promotion of quality policies in the healthcare sector starting in 2011, when it published Normative Resolution No. 277/2011, which established a voluntary accreditation program for health plan operators ⁽¹⁰⁾.

A higher volume of studies was observed in 2016, with six publications (26.08%), compared to 2011, which recorded four studies (17.40%). In the following years, although interest in discussions about Hospital Accreditation, Nursing care, and management persisted, the number remained lower, standing out again in 2024 with two studies (8,70%).

Adherence to Accreditation in Brazil appears to have shown exponential growth. By March 2017, ONA had registered 255 accredited hospitals in the country. When analyzing more recent data, it is evident that, considering only hospitals certified by the national methodology, there was an absolute increase of 54 hospital organizations between 2017 and 2021, which corresponds to an average of 13.5 additional certifications per year during the period, representing a growth of 21,1%).

According to the National Registry of Health Establishments (CNES), as of September 2022, Brazil had 7,488 registered hospitals. In 2023/2024, still under statistical study, 17% of them were accredited under the ONA methodology ⁽⁹⁾.

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred between 2019 and 2023, had a profound and multifaceted impact on the Brazilian scientific landscape, resulting in a slowdown of research and studies in several areas. The global health crisis required an immediate reorientation of scientific efforts, with a large portion of resources and attention being directed toward combating the virus and mitigating its effects. This led to the interruption or significant reduction of research projects that were not directly related to COVID-19.

The study highlights nursing as the professional category that most actively seeks scientific knowledge about hospital accreditation, especially concerning ONA certification. This pursuit reflects the commitment of nursing professionals to improving their practice, enhancing the quality of care provided, and implementing better management practices. The active participation of nurses in research on the implications of accreditation demonstrates the importance of the profession in strengthening patient safety and ensuring the efficiency of hospital processes, being fundamental to the continuous development of healthcare assistance and management.

Discussion

The implementation of ONA standards requires rigorous process standardization, which leads to greater efficiency and patient safety. Certification promotes the creation of performance and effectiveness indicators, facilitating continuous monitoring and improvement of clinical and administrative practices. Management improvement is, therefore, a direct result of this certification, with the integration of processes that enhance safety and quality of care ⁽⁹⁻¹⁰⁾.

In addition, the importance of staff training and teamwork is emphasized, as they are fundamental to fostering a culture of patient safety. The continuous development of healthcare professionals' skills and collaboration among different institutional areas are valuable for the successful implementation of ONA-established standards ⁽⁹⁾.

Accreditation, as a work process, promotes the improvement of essential conditions, ensuring greater safety, while also contributing to the stability of the organizational climate among healthcare professionals. At the same time, it creates a more pleasant work environment and strengthens human relationships ⁽²⁴⁾.

The quality standard of a hospital is monitored through management and care services, mainly focused on nursing, which plays a fundamental role within the organizational environment ⁽²³⁻²⁵⁾. These services verify compliance with criteria and actions to achieve established goals, ensuring administrative process control and correcting possible deviations ⁽²⁹⁻³¹⁻³⁴⁾. Furthermore, auditing assesses the quality of care and users' access to provided services. The use of indicators for evaluating personnel management is essential to detect the efficiency and effectiveness of managerial actions and, based on the results of these evaluations, to improve work processes.

The movement of nurses themselves to reclaim the central focus of their work—along with institutional concern to meet user expectations, whether through quality programs or as a survival strategy in the market—has given greater importance to the competency of client-centered focus ⁽²³⁻³²⁻³⁵⁻³⁸⁾. Aligning organizational objectives with patient needs has become an increasing priority for Nursing managers, aiming for the continuous improvement of provided services.

Organizational communication is an effective tool to support significant changes within organizations, such as achieving hospital accreditation ⁽²²⁻²⁴⁻³¹⁾. Moreover, this communication fosters motivation and commitment among healthcare professionals and leaders to implement the necessary changes. This results in improved service delivery to patients, ensuring excellence in care.

The nurse stands out as a key professional and facilitator, actively participating in organizational decisions and being essential for the institution to achieve its internal objectives. However, interdisciplinarity is considered fundamental to ensuring quality care, promoting teamwork, and guaranteeing the comprehensiveness of care ⁽²⁶⁾.

Thus, standardization must be continuously reviewed and adjusted to maintain its relevance and effectiveness in daily practice.

The main implications of ONA in nursing management and care, according to the studies used in this review, are the organization of accredited institutions, standardization of nursing care and management processes, and the development of skills and competencies. However, a negative implication was observed related to motivation, stress, and overload among the teams involved in the accreditation process.

Motivation and recognition, both internal and external, play a vital role in this context, as they help promote a cultural shift that values safety and quality in patient-centered care ⁽⁰⁹⁻³⁹⁾. Several studies highlight the challenges in implementing and maintaining the ONA-created system, particularly regarding organizational culture, staff turnover, process standardization with a focus on quality, and the motivation of those involved ⁽⁰⁹⁻¹⁰⁾.

The human resource management strategy adopted by healthcare institutions has provided remarkable benefits, such as greater team autonomy, active participation in proposed improvements, recognition and appreciation of work, and investments in professional training ⁽²⁵⁻²⁸⁾.

Hospitals are seeking new care models that foster competitiveness and continuously develop skills and competencies with excellence.

Finally, adherence to ONA accreditation criteria contributes to strengthening the culture of patient safety and to the continuous improvement

of healthcare services, benefiting all those involved. Nurses stand out as the most prominent professional category, actively participating and achieving results during the accreditation process, as their work is directed toward quality management, demonstrating their commitment to delivering care and services with excellence.

By encouraging behavioral change and the adoption of more rigorous practices, ONA certification promotes a more structured and effective approach to nursing management. The focus on standardization, training, and performance evaluation creates an environment where the quality of care is prioritized and where safety and patient-centered care are integrated at all levels of hospital care ⁽³⁹⁾.

Conclusion

Accreditation often results in profound changes in nursing processes and procedures, promoting the standardization of practices, improvement of documentation, focus on patient safety, continuous education, and regular performance evaluation. At the same time, establishing a culture of quality and safety becomes essential, engaging all professionals—especially nurses—in the ongoing pursuit of continuous improvement.

These transformations positively impact not only patients, who receive safer and higher-quality care, but also nursing teams, who improve their workflows and enjoy a more efficient and professional work environment. Furthermore, Hospital Accreditation can be seen as a competitive advantage for institutions, attracting more patients and strategic partnerships.

During the preparation process for evaluation, teamwork is strengthened, and the professionals involved become agents of cultural change, resulting in significant improvements such as the standardization and optimization of processes, generating substantial benefits for patient-centered care.

The implications of Hospital Accreditation in nursing care and management highlight a strong commitment to quality, safety, and excellence in healthcare delivery. This process represents a continuous transformation for nursing and for the healthcare sector as a whole, aiming to provide high-quality care and promote the professional development of nurses.

For future research, it is suggested that studies be developed to explore the creation of specific protocols that integrate the active participation of nursing professionals with a patient-centered approach. These protocols should aim to enhance the quality of care by aligning practices with the individual needs and preferences of patients.

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