

Special Article

Nursing and Caring: An Historical Overview from Ancient Greek Tradition to Modern Times

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Abstract

Introduction: Nursing as a humanistic profession is closely related to the core of caring which embraces the human essence in both illness and good health. This position paper examines the fundamental humanistic elements of caring and nursing particularly from a Greek perspective.

Aim: to discuss critically the implications of care delivery in the Balkan Peninsula by looking at the deeper 'roots' of these notions, within their historical and geographical contexts.

Method: a historical literature search was undertaken in a 'time series snapshots' methodology whereby key events and historical contexts were critically appraised with regard to the evolution of nursing as an art and science. Key words include: nursing, caring, ancient Greece, Rome, Balkans, and history. Both international and national library databases were used.

Results-Discussion: Just like modern medicine, nursing also uses the Hippocratic Medical heritage as its base and therefore Hippocrates could be seen as a 'shared forefather' for health care professionals. It is often argued that in his early writings he described in detail what is now the nursing profession as he did not mention 'nurses' but referred to doctor assistants! Nursing has now become an independent scientific discipline with discrete evidence based knowledge but certainly the care side still has powerful historic, cultural and traditional roots.

Conclusions drawn from a review of the literature show that historically the roots of Nursing and Caring in Greece and the Balkan Peninsula have a triple dimension. a) Caring care was provided within the family mainly by members, slaves and servants. b) Wartime nursing care was provided by private citizens but also by nobles who possessed the art of healing and caring. c) Organised nursing care was provided in many hospitals in the early Byzantine Empire. Hostels and Nursing Homes were run by monks and laity, voluntary men and women initially as a token of Christian love and later on payment.

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