

# Course work on nursing professionalism

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## **Nursing professionalism**

Since medieval times, the concept of nursing care has been associated with an array of meanings ranging from the provision of basic care to the young, sick and elderly to Nightingale's 1858 definition of the goal of nursing as being to put the patient in the most appropriate condition for nature processes to act upon him to current definitions by nursing theorists and professional nursing bodies. For example, the American Nurses Association (1995) defined nursing as the " diagnosis and treatments of human responses to health and illness" (Brunner, Bare & Smeelter, 2009, p. 5). Based on these definitions and depending on the historical period, nursing was and continues to be seen as either a calling, a profession or both. The aim of this essay therefore is to compare and contrast nursing as a calling and as a profession. This will be achieved by making comparisons in relation to the two on the basis of aspects like communication, knowledge base, change, health care, research and other disciplines.

## **Body**

Professionalism is defined as either the conduct, qualities or aims that are the hallmark of a profession or of persons in a particular profession. A profession on the other hand can be defined as a calling which requires specialized knowledge as well as a period of extensive and more often than not long academic preparation. Alternatively, a profession can be defined as the integral body of all persons who are engaged in a calling or a vocation. Based on the notion that a profession is a calling, it can be argued that nursing is both a profession and a calling (Potterville College, n. d.).

On the other hand, if the word calling is understood in the context of being summoned to a specific duty which in this case the is provision of basic nursing care either as a religious calling or a duty calling like for those in the military or as the obligation for family members to care for each other, then the criteria that delineates a profession from just any other basic work provides ample grounds for the comparison of nursing as a call to professional nursing.

The first characteristic of any profession is that it must have a unique body of knowledge on which its practice is based. The care provided by nurses like the work done by professionals in other fields is in essence therefore rooted on a strong foundation of knowledge. Since the times of Florence Nightgale, the founder of nursing, the provision of nursing care has always been based on knowledge in form of theories, models, concepts amongst others. For example, nurses during training are educated on the normal physiology and anatomy of the human body, further they are taught on how disease processes alter the functioning of the body. Additionally, they are trained on the different models of nursing care provision for instance, the self-care model by Dorothea Orem. This educational preparation coupled with preparation in other knowledge fields like communication and public health is what provides the basis for their future nursing practice. A calling on the other hand does not involve or require one to have specialized knowledge in a specific field (National League for Nursing, 2004, p. 9).

Additionally, members in a profession are required to ensure that they continually update their professional knowledge base and competencies by partaking in both formal as well as informal on-going education. Continuous education is meant to enable nurses to conform to current knowledge by

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making the necessary changes to their professional practice. This differs from calling in that it is presumed that those called to do nursing have the physical or moral attributes that will enable them provide the required nursing care. The notion of calling therefore paid more attention to moral and physical characteristics of a person than to their professional knowledge base (National League for Nurses, 2004, p. 9).

Another characteristic of a profession that distinguishes professional nursing from mere calling is the requirement that all professionals publish and communicate what they know about nursing as well as any advances or changes they make for the purpose of sharing their information with not only their peers but also those in training. This in stark contrast to the notion of calling whereby it was perceived that one required only a few basic skills to carry out their nursing obligations and hence there was no apparent need for dissemination of information on advances/ changes in nursing. In short therefore, each nurse called to serve provided care based on their own knowledge and individual experiences often at the demerit of patients (National League for nursing, 2004, p. 9).

Further, the fact that individual nurses as well as the whole nursing profession are intergrally involved in research so as to expand the nursing knowledge base sets it apart from the past idea that nursing is more of a religious calling than a profession. This is so because if it were simply a religious calling, then the concept of evidence-based practice, the driving force behind nursing research would not take precedence. Nightingale was actually the first person who attempted to divorce professional nursing from the popular belief at the time that nursing was simply about provision of basic care by participating in research for the purposes of improving the

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quality of care provided to the patients (Masters, 2005, p. 19).

In the context of health care provision of which nursing care is a component of, professional nursing care differs from basic care in that nurses provide holistic care whereby they concern themselves with not only the management of the disease affecting an individual but also the meaning of the illness to the the individual and his/her family. For instance, nurses help their patients and clients suffering from diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and parasitic diseases amongst others to make appropriate adjustments to their diets, activity patterns as well as their lifestyles while basic care is content with the treatment of presenting symptoms only. More notable is the fact that nursing care deviates from the basic care provided in that nurses involve themselves not only in the management of their individual patients but also their families and communities as well (National League For Nursing , 2004, p. 9).

Educational preparation of nurses in fields other than nursing like microbiology, sociology and pharmacology is another point at which professional nursing diverges from the basic care provided by those who are called to serve. Professional nurses are therefore more prepared and thus in a better position to be able to coordinate and integrate the care of their patients with that provided by other disciplines because they have the prerequisite knowledge on the roles and functions of the other disciplines as they pertain to patient care (Masters, 2004, p. 19).

In conclusion therefore, depending on the definition ascribed to the term profession, nursing can be termed both a call and a profession. Notable however is the fact that professional nursing is quite different from the traditional meaning of provision of basic care which has been attributed to <https://assignbuster.com/course-work-on-nursing-professionalism/>

the notion of nursing being a calling particularly in terms of communication, health care, research, change, knowledge base and other disciplines.

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