



THE CONTRIBUTION OF AN ACADEMIC LEAGUE IN UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING IN NURSING \*

*A CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE UMA LIGA ACADÊMICA NO ENSINO DE GRADUAÇÃO EM ENFERMAGEM*

*LA CONTRIBUCIÓN DE UNA LIGA ACADÉMICA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE GRADUCIÓN EN ENFERMERÍA*

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This quantitative, descriptive and cross study, which aimed to identify and assess the contribution of the Students' League in the education undergraduate nursing. Data were collected from May to August 2010, using a semi-structured questionnaire, applied to graduate students on the premises of an institution of higher education and sent via electronic mail, to the graduates, a total of 22 respondents linked to a league preventing and combating cancer. The answers were structured in a database in Excel (Windows 2007), and after, the analysis performed by means of Epi Info software, using descriptive statistics. Respected the ethical rules. All respondents said that the league has contributed to academic learning. The League proved to be an important educational strategy, contributing to training to critical reflection on oncology and promoting humane care.

**Descriptors:** Oncology; Education Nursing; Professional Competence; Community-Institutional Relations; Teaching.

Estudo quantitativo, descritivo e transversal, que objetivou identificar e avaliar a contribuição de uma liga acadêmica no ensino de graduação em enfermagem. Os dados foram coletados de maio a agosto de 2010, por meio de um questionário semiestruturado aplicado aos alunos de graduação nas dependências de uma instituição de ensino superior e enviado, via correio eletrônico, aos egressos, totalizando 22 entrevistados vinculados a uma liga de prevenção e combate ao câncer. As respostas foram estruturadas em um banco de dados na planilha Excel (Windows 2007) e, após, realizada análise por meio do software Epi Info, utilizando estatística descritiva. Respeitados os preceitos éticos. Todos os entrevistados afirmaram que a liga contribuiu para o aprendizado acadêmico. A Liga mostrou-se como uma importante estratégia de ensino, contribuindo para formação profissional, para a reflexão crítica sobre oncologia e promoção da assistência humanizada.

**Descritores:** Oncologia; Educação em Enfermagem; Competência Profissional; Relações Comunidade Instituição; Ensino.

Estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo y transversal, cuyo objetivo fue identificar y evaluar la contribución de una liga de estudiantes de enfermería. Llevado a cabo entre mayo y agosto de 2010, a través de un cuestionario semiestructurado aplicado a estudiantes de graduación en las instalaciones de una institución de educación superior y enviado por correo electrónico, a los graduados, con total de 22 encuestados vinculados a una aleación la prevención y la lucha contra el cáncer. Las respuestas han sido estructuradas en una base de datos en Excel (Windows 2007), y después, el análisis realizado por medio del programa Epi Info, utilizando estadística descriptiva. Cumplido con las normas éticas. Todos los encuestados afirmaron que la Liga ha contribuido para el aprendizaje académico. La Liga demostró ser una enseñanza importante, que contribuye a la formación profesional, para reflexión crítica sobre oncología y promoción de la asistencia humanitaria.

**Descritores:** Oncología; Educación en Enfermería; Competencia Profesional; Relaciones Comunidad-Institución; Enseñanza.

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## INTRODUCTION

Cancer is a public health problem for the developed world and also for developing nations. In Brazil, the distribution of different types of cancer suggests an epidemiological transition in progress, the current living standards adopted in relation to work, nutrition and consumption in general expose individuals to more aggressive environmental factors related to chemical, physical and biological agents resulting from an industrialization increasingly evolved<sup>(1)</sup>.

The epidemiological Brazilian profile points neoplasms as the second cause of mortality, changing in the last twenty-five years from fifth to second place. Projections by the World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that in 2030, the number of cancer deaths will reach 23.4 million. The most insidious types of cancers will be non-melanoma skin, prostate, lung, colorectal and stomach cancers for males, and non-melanoma skin, breast, cervix, colon and rectum, and thyroid gland cancers for females<sup>(2)</sup>.

Cancer has been considered not only a biological phenomenon, but of emotional and social nature, in all its magnitude, because it generates a lot of suffering, both because of the disease itself, through the undesirable consequences of treatment, and also the emotional factor, causing discomfort to anticipate future problems<sup>(3)</sup>. Therefore, we understand cancer as a public health problem, whose origins and developments have a multifactorial order, which makes paramount the development of actions to promote prevention and early detection of the disease.

This perspective, focused on the support of individuals who may be suffering from cancer, implies that professionals as well as students in the health area, especially Nursing, should be able to mobilize multiple resources (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to deal with complex situations of daily professional oncology<sup>(4)</sup>.

Therefore, it is essential that the educational institutions rethink their strategies and priorities for the

training of new professionals, especially in oncology, who will assist a population whose estimated life is getting bigger, who is growing rapidly and who is looking for more health services to meet their needs, in a situation where the incidence of cancer increases each year. Thus, it is essential to think about the initial training of nurses<sup>(4)</sup>.

In this sense, it is worth reflecting on the inclusion of the teaching of oncology in undergraduate curricula in nursing, and for this insertion to happen it is necessary to be contextualized in Political Pedagogical Project (PPP) of the university<sup>(5)</sup>. The PPP is presented as a way to explain the objectives of a course and guide strategies, being an instrument of integration and coordination of actions of the various individuals involved in the educational process<sup>(6)</sup>.

Thus, through the PPP we can design an analysis of how the training of nursing professionals is. The Political Pedagogical Project of the Nursing School of Ribeirão Preto, University of São Paulo (USP-EERP), adopted since 2004, is based on the principle of the integrated and competence curriculum. As a pedagogical framework it advocates a critical-reflexive education in which the student is expected to be an active subject of the teaching-learning process in order to contribute to the social transformation of reality.

Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Health Courses, including the PPP from the EERP-USP, were developed to meet the requirements of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) - Law n. 9394 from December 20, 1996, and present as one of its objectives the learning to learn, which is a synthesis of learning to be, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to know<sup>(7)</sup>.

Considering that the contemporaneity demands a new professional profile that should be able to attend these new perspectives, it is understood that the education demands new relationships and pedagogical

interactions, as well as new teaching-learning processes. Under this approach, the reflection on the integration among teaching activities, research and extension education emerges<sup>(5)</sup>. Inserted in this context, extension activities, which present a conceptual and practical diversity interfere significantly in the "thinking" and "doing" in the university<sup>(8)</sup>.

The university extension involves the education of the student, of the professor and of society; it is based on the contribution and commitment with the building of a critical and autonomous society, producer of knowledge in order to generate autonomy and participation in decisions and resolutions to the issues demanded by the context, by the subject and by the general social environment. However, it complements the education of the undergraduate students providing the practical application of knowledge gained in teaching activities<sup>(9)</sup>.

Historically, student participation in the development of social and academic life is undeniable. Numerous social projects and initiatives of extension activities are conducted through the organization and mobilization of students, developing actions that are the result of engaging in discussions about social problems. Besides operating in social movements and spaces for rights claim, the students' action also involves academic discussions and particular themes for technical and vocational training<sup>(10)</sup>.

One of the strategies adopted by undergraduate students to participate in their training process and have the opportunity to engage in university extension activities is the creation of academic leagues, which are defined as groups composed by students who decide to organize themselves formally to "deepen a study on a specific topic and attend the population's demand" under the guidance of a professor<sup>(11)</sup>. The activities are extracurricular and developed in general as classes, courses, research and assistance in different practice settings<sup>(9)</sup>.

Participants of the leagues are from different undergraduate years, not always from the same course, who operate under the guidance and supervision of tutors linked to an educational institution or hospital carrying out educational, health care, research and extension activities in a particular specialty or area from health knowledge. Among the different teaching techniques, the academic leagues are increasingly assuming importance in the formation of students as an extracurricular activity, given its potential to contribute to the design of their future career<sup>(10)</sup>.

In this sense, reflecting on nursing undergraduate teaching, oncology and university extension activities, the EERP-USP has several leagues, created in different moments with the faculty and students' participation, as a way to diversify the opportunities for academic complementation and maintain the students closer to the subject they want to develop and deepen their expertise, and among them is the League for Prevention and Fight of Cancer (LPCC).

Since its foundation in 1998, the LPCC aims to spread knowledge among undergraduate and graduate students, healthcare professionals and the community so that they can better cope with the cancer in its multidimensional aspect, and thus prevent it and fight it. Since there is no subject in the academic curriculum focused on oncology in nursing, the LPCC comes as a means of supplementing the education of students seeking this knowledge. The nursing students observe the EERP in their academic experiences and through the tendency in the epidemiological process, more and more people affected by cancer, the great demand from these patients with oncological diseases by teaching hospitals and the primary care network. Therefore, it is necessary some training to ensure subsidies aimed at the practice and the morbidity profile of the Brazilian population<sup>(6)</sup>.

The objectives of the LPCC are to provide students and health professionals with more contact with scientific contents that deal with the subject in

order to enable them to act as educators; educate the population about the basics of oncology, prevention and cancer control through execution of courses, lectures and pamphlets; integrate with other institutions who share the same interests such as other leagues, groups/nuclei; conduct prevention campaigns in squares, schools and health units through the distribution of brochures, manuals, booklets intended for community at large; hold commemorative events to combat various types of cancer, through leafleting and lecture series.

The assumption of this research is that academic leagues contribute to the education process of the student, as it promotes the deepening on the subject of oncology and thus they contribute to a critical-reflective education, making the student an active subject of the teaching and learning process.

The objective of this study was to identify and assess the contribution of the LPCC for the teaching of nursing undergraduate students.

## METHODS

The research presents a methodological, quantitative approach, with a descriptive, exploratory and cross nature. The choice of quantitative method was due to the fact that the researchers consider it the most appropriate for achieving the objectives proposed in the study, as they can quantify the sample opinion about the contribution of the league, besides providing a description of activities the participants and their relationship to academic training, especially concerning the area of oncology.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured questionnaire containing 10 questions and having as main variables: general and professional data of the participants (identification data such as name initials, age, sex, duration of academic training) and information related to evaluation of the participants of

the research about the contribution of LPCC in nursing undergraduate teaching.

The instrument was developed by the researchers themselves and applied in the period from May-August 2010 after approval by the Ethics in Research Committee from the EERP (Protocol # 1125/2010).

As inclusion criteria of the participants it was necessary for them to participate in the LPCC, at the time of the collection, or to be active members of the league during the graduation period, and to accept freely the research informants.

The research was conducted with undergraduate students on the premises of EERP / USP and the questionnaire was sent, via email, to graduates who participated in the League when they were nursing students.

The names of the participants of the LPCC were consulted in the minute of the league's meeting, from January 2005 until the data collection, 85 ex-participants were mentioned. We obtained 65 active e-mails and then sent invitations, the Term of Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE) and the questionnaire. The former members were informed that the questionnaire response would mean they agreed with the information sent from the TCLE.

Twelve of these former students agreed to cooperate with the research and answered the questionnaire that, according to the minutes, often participated in the activities of the LPCC. The students who were taking the course were addressed at the school and after being informed about the objectives, rationale and methodology of the research, agreed to participate and all of them signed the informed consent form. Thus, the other informants, a total of ten, were still undergraduate students and participants of the LPCC.

Therefore, the study sample consisted of 22 participants. Before application, the instrument was assessed by professionals who work with oncology and

tutors of the leagues from EERP / USP, and the suggested changes were accepted.

After data collection a database was structured in Excel spreadsheet (Windows 2007). The double entry and data validation were performed to identify possible errors. Statistical analysis was performed using Epi-Info, 6.04 version, using descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS

As the profile of the population studied, all 22 (100.0%) respondents were single and female. Regarding age, 02 (9.0%) students were classified in the age group of under 20 years old, 13 (58.5%), from 20 to 25 years old and 07 (31.5%) aged 25 or more.

Regarding their education 12 (54.5%) of the participants were former students, that is, had a college degree, and 10 (45.5%) were undergraduate students, being 06 from the 8th semester (60.0%), 02 from the 4th semester (20.0%) and 02 (20.0%) from the 6th semester from the undergraduate nursing course.

All the interviewees stated that the LPCC contributed to their academic growth. Among these contributions, they mentioned the ones they considered the most important: deepening their knowledge on the oncology topic in lectures, debates after videos, documentaries and films - 11 (50.0%); improve interpersonal relationship - 06 (27.3%) and opportunity to develop the organizational side of scientific events - 05 (22.7%).

Out of the total respondents, 21 (95.5%) participated in all activities from the LPCC. The participation methods were allocated to items, totaling 110 responses, of which: 39 (35.5%) creation of guidelines booklets, participation in health events and distribution of educational pamphlets, 26 (23.6%) meetings for organizing scientific events from the LPCC and support to other academic leagues in the preparation of the events and 45 (40.9%) weekly meetings to draw up plans goals and / or view lectures,

film discussions, attended by guests from the health area.

When asked about participation in scientific events in the field of oncology (symposia, conferences, seminars, courses) in the last four years, 09 (40.9%) of the participants said yes and 13 (59.1%) had not attended such events.

Participants were asked to suggest activities for the development and improvement of the LPCC: 07 (31.8%) suggested more dynamic extension activities, such as hospital and home visits to patients, 03 (13.6%) advised more discussions about films and documentaries with health professionals, focused on oncology, 04 (18.2%) suggested lectures outside the league's meeting time; 03 (13.6%) suggested that former students and other professionals should give lectures, 02 (9.0%) would like to invite patients to provide testimonials and 03 (13.6%) did not respond to this item of the questionnaire.

## DISCUSSION

The results showed that all participants were female, unmarried, and most of them were between 21 and 25 years old (67.5%), confirming another study<sup>(12)</sup>, conducted with students from the nursing course, that found a predominance of young, unmarried women. The study also related this fact to the prejudice that exists around the image of the profession as nursing, historically, is linked to a female occupation. The authors cited, however, that changes show that there is a constant movement in the interest of young people and break of prejudices, so that the number of men in this course has been growing in recent years.

All interviewees stated that the LPCC has contributed to their academic growth. The insertion of students in leagues brings them the opportunity to developed activities of scientific nature, such as research projects and it also awakens the critical- reflective thinking about the importance of involvement in

extracurricular activities. In the leagues, the students develop research projects and participate in activities with health services and the community<sup>(9)</sup>.

The initiatives in terms of research are one of the most positively impactful regarding the role of leagues. It is increasingly significant the number of students who develop projects of undergraduate research within the academic environment of the academic leagues<sup>(13)</sup>. It is believed that by experiencing areas of research, students become better professionals by potentially increasing their critical vision and their power of reflection about the health needs facing the object of study in question<sup>(14)</sup>. Regarding the educational activities in the community, guidance and participation of the population in health events are some of the most important social activities that are available to an academic league<sup>(13)</sup>. Thus, the contributions of a league in the students' background seem to be prevalent.

Researchers evaluated the performance of students who are members of a league in their undergraduate course, and found a strong relationship between frequency in the activities and improvement in academic grades. Thus, students who participated in the league showed improvement in knowledge assessment tests, suggesting that the league is a useful teaching tool and that it promotes learning gain, contributing to the education of the students<sup>(15)</sup>.

According to this survey, most participants - 11 (50.0%) claimed to have deepened their knowledge about oncology in lectures, debates after videos, documentaries and movies. The lectures enrich discussions about cancer and its consequences. Recent studies indicate exposure to theoretical lectures as one of the main activities developed in academic leagues that assist in the educational process<sup>(14)</sup>.

In this sense, the lessons and content taught in the academic activities of the leagues should not be seen as correctives to the unexpected failure of the formal curriculum, however, they should complement

the activities within the university, serving as a starting point for renewed discussion and constant readjustment in the curriculum due to the need to update it<sup>(13)</sup>.

Some of the respondents - 06 (27.3%) said they had improved interpersonal relationships. The interaction of students in academic leagues facilitates bringing together students from other courses, different professionals and their views. The mutual collaboration in activities such as making booklets of guidelines, participation in health events and distribution of educational pamphlets and supporting other academic leagues in the preparation of their events, can improve communication skills with other students and with the community. Students learn how to work in teams, which also favors the education process<sup>(9)</sup>.

The opportunity to develop the organizational side of scientific events, highlighted by the interviewees - 5 (22.7%), brought experience with multidisciplinary work and added knowledge. In this aspect, research shows that the leagues are intended to promote dialogue between professionals from different fields of knowledge, seeking scientific exchange with other professionals and study groups<sup>(10)</sup>.

Almost all participants - 21 (95.5%) performed all activities of the LPCC. One considers that this large adhesion may happen because students visualize the league as an opportunity to enhance their knowledge in oncology, enhancing their skills in the subject, thus contributing to their academic growth as well as they met the authors of a study<sup>(15)</sup> on the contribution of a league in teaching anesthesiology.

In this study, the ways of participation in the LPCC were allocated to items, totaling 110 responses, of which: 39 (35.5%) making booklets of guidelines, participation in health events and distribution of educational pamphlets, 26 (23.6%) meetings for organization of scientific events of the LPCC and support to other academic leagues in the preparation of their events and 45 (40.9%) weekly meetings to draw up

plans, goals and / or view lectures, film discussions, with the presence of healthcare guests. The activities developed and offered to the participants of the LPCC aim to guide students and the population about concepts and treatments of various types of cancers, as well as actions for prevention and combat of the disease.

The undergraduate students, health professionals, graduate students and community members come join the league by invitations posted on the wall of the LPCC in the EERP / USP or by the indication of fellow members from the LPCC. Regular meetings took place, on Mondays, in the afternoon, from 1 to 2 pm, where lectures were held on the theme, prepared by the members themselves or taught by guest lecturers; group activities on the subject; discussions for organization of events and division of tasks. In a recent study<sup>(14)</sup>, the profile of the academic leagues was drawn and the activities addressed in LPCC corroborate the findings of the authors regarding their issues and practices.

For the development and improvement of the LPCC, as activities suggested by the participants came the hospital and home visits to patients, that is, dynamic activities of extension, 07 (31.8%), which demonstrates the importance of academic interaction with community assisted by them. Moreover, the extension provides professionals with the opportunity to work best as a citizen because society is a privileged space of knowledge production to overcome the significant social inequalities, the change of ideas and perspectives about the world<sup>(16)</sup>.

In this regard, we emphasize that the LPCC, based on its extension activities, works as an interface between the university and the community in which it is embedded, promoting exchange of experience and a way to socialize the knowledge acquired and developed within university laboratories.

Other participants 03 (13.6%) pointed out the need for further discussions of films and documentaries, with health professionals, focused on oncology, 04 (18.2%) suggested lectures outside the league's meeting time and 03 (13.6%) indicated that former students and other professionals should give lectures. All these data demonstrate the need felt by the league to deepen the theme of cancer, confirming that the nursing students recognize the importance of knowledge about oncology.

Given this, it reinforces that because the National Curriculum professes the formation of a generalist nurse, some educational institutions, by making their "adjustments" to incorporate certain principles, excluded some subjects, for understanding they should be specific for teaching at post-graduation courses (specialization), not showing initiatives for educational reworking aiming to seek an education contextualized with health conditions of the population as well as the profile of former students according to social and health, local and regional needs<sup>(6)</sup>.

Another interesting result of this study is that 02 (9.0%) of participants would like to invite patients to testify. This finding, although in a small number, highlights the fact that the exploration of the cancer theme awakens students to the importance of a comprehensive and humanized health care, when they recognize the professional's need to know the experiences, attitudes, anxieties of cancer patients through their reports<sup>(6)</sup>.

Thus, the LPCC has provided changes in the students' view regarding also the relationship with patients, learners eventually end up having a more mature look to emotional issues involved in the disease process and its effects. In this sense, the study indicates that it is of fundamental importance that the emotional aspects of patients with neoplastic disorders such as depression, anxiety, fear related to death, apathy, among others, are considered and valued<sup>(17)</sup>.

It is also noteworthy that 09 (40.9%) of the participants had attended in the last four years, scientific events in the field of oncology. This significant percentage demonstrates that participation in the league has raised the need to deepen their knowledge about cancer, contributing to their training as nurses, as oncology absorbs most of the former students from the nursing course. Authors recognize and comment that the areas of nursing together with these patients are large, inserted from the primary to the tertiary care. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare professors and students to face this national emerging and epidemiological reality<sup>(6)</sup>.

This study becomes important for spreading the work of an academic league and its academic contribution in undergraduate nursing students, because there are few studies that have evaluated the activities carried out by the leagues and their importance to the education of nurses.

It is essential that the leagues promote a strong connection between teaching, research and extension, reinforcing a virtue expected from the university. This junction comes from the understanding that the activities related to theoretical training and clinical experience in the leagues can be useful in scientific research and in health education in the community and that they can foster theoretical discussions and have applicability in population approach<sup>(8)</sup>.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study demonstrated the junction of the teaching-learning and practice of an annual planning that the activities from the LPCC offer their participants. Students, during weekly meetings, symposia, workshops and other scientific extension events, practiced the theory learned in these activities, reinforcing the importance of keeping up the pursuit of deepening on the subject.

We believe that the university leagues can exert great influence on the education of nursing students. In the search for a quality activity, which can offer tools for critical-reflective and active developing, the LPCC has created in the students the exercise of comprehensive care to the patient, and even awakening for research activities, with the aim of bringing the community benefits from the outcomes.

It was evident the importance that the activities of the LPCC had to train the students who participated throughout the undergraduate course. They took advantage of opportunities to learn about the topic of oncology and could also develop the organizational practice of scientific events, strengthening human and multidisciplinary relationships.

However, we emphasize that the leagues cannot be simple scientific societies to early specialization of students. To avoid this risk, they should be evaluated to ensure the links between teaching, research and extension, aiming to improve the education of nurses.

Thus, the leagues, as examples of university extension, should be a space in which scientific knowledge is used in the service of society, considering the importance to avoid reinforcing academic vices, but refine the relationship between university and community.

Thus, an academic league represents a unique opportunity for the development of extracurricular activities, directed to the knowledge of its members, scientific research and health promotion in the community in general and patients, when properly directed, it collaborates positively in the training of its participants and it is an experience that can be extended to other undergraduate programs and other leagues.

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