

Nursing Through the Ages: Tracing the Legacy and Transformation of Florence Nightingale's Influence

Victoria Grando*

Department of Medicine, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, Scotland, UK

Mini Review

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*For Correspondence

Victoria Grando, Department of Medicine, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, Scotland, UK

E-mail: victoriagrando@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Nursing, often referred to as the "heart" of healthcare, has come a long way from its origins as a humble caregiving practice to becoming a respected and integral profession within the medical field. At the forefront of this transformation stands Florence Nightingale, a pioneer who not only revolutionized nursing practices but also left an enduring legacy that continues to shape the profession to this day. Florence Nightingale's legacy is a testament to her profound impact on nursing, healthcare and societal perceptions of women's roles. Her contributions extend far beyond her lifetime, shaping the way nursing is practiced, taught and perceived to this day. Nightingale's influence on nursing practice cannot be overstated. Her emphasis on sanitation, hygiene and evidence-based care revolutionized patient outcomes. By meticulously collecting and analyzing data, she demonstrated the importance of a scientific approach to healthcare. Her efforts significantly reduced mortality rates in hospitals and paved the way for modern infection control practices.

Keywords: Nursing education, Florence Nightingale's influence, Healthcare

INTRODUCTION

Before the 19th century, nursing was not regarded as a formal profession. It was often carried out by untrained individuals, such as family members or nuns and was generally considered a menial task. However, everything changed with the arrival of Florence Nightingale, a British nurse and social reformer who would go on to become the foundational figure in modern nursing. Born in 1820, Florence Nightingale's influence began to take shape during the Crimean War in the 1850s. Recognizing the deplorable conditions in military hospitals and the lack of proper care for wounded soldiers, Nightingale and her team of nurses embarked on a mission to transform healthcare. With dedication and determination, they improved sanitation, established protocols for infection control and provided compassionate patient care^[1]. Nightingale's insistence on evidence-based practices laid the groundwork for the scientific approach that is now a cornerstone of nursing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most significant contributions that Nightingale made to nursing was her emphasis on evidence-based practice. She meticulously collected data on patient outcomes, mortality rates and other critical factors. Her statistical analysis of this data enabled her to demonstrate the impact of proper sanitation and hygiene on patient outcomes. This empirical approach not only saved lives during her time but also laid the foundation for the rigorous scientific methodology that modern nursing embraces. Nightingale's legacy of evidence-based practice has evolved over the years^[2]. Contemporary nurses now engage in research, analyze data and implement evidence-based interventions to provide the best possible care to their patients. Her influence can be seen in the development of nursing theory and the integration of research into nursing education and practice.

Florence Nightingale's impact extended beyond the battlefield and into the realm of nursing education. She established the first formal nursing school, the Nightingale Training School for Nurses at St. Thomas' Hospital in London in 1860. This institution set the stage for professionalizing nursing by providing structured education and training for aspiring nurses. Nightingale's cur-

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riculum included subjects such as anatomy, physiology and nursing ethics, setting a precedent for the comprehensive education nurses receive today ^[3]. As nursing education evolved, so did the standards for professionalism within the field. Nightingale's emphasis on compassion, ethics and patient-centered care continues to influence the way nurses approach their roles. Modern nurses are expected to uphold high standards of professionalism, maintaining a balance between technical skills and the humanistic aspects of caregiving.

DISCUSSION

Nightingale's establishment of the Nightingale Training School for Nurses marked a turning point in nursing education. This school set the precedent for formalized, structured nursing education. Her curriculum, which included both scientific and ethical components, laid the foundation for nursing education as we know it today. Her commitment to education elevated nursing from a vocation to a respected profession. Florence Nightingale's actions challenged societal norms and opened doors for women's advancement ^[4]. At a time when women's opportunities were limited, she defied expectations by pursuing a nursing career. Her leadership and achievements demonstrated that women could excel in fields traditionally dominated by men. Nightingale's determination helped pave the way for greater gender equality in the workplace.

While Nightingale's impact on general nursing practices is undeniable, the field has also witnessed a proliferation of specialized nursing roles. As medical knowledge expanded and technology advanced, new opportunities emerged for nurses to specialize in areas such as critical care, pediatrics, oncology and psychiatric nursing, among others ^[5]. These specializations have allowed nurses to focus their expertise and provide specialized care to diverse patient populations. Nightingale's use of data and statistics to drive change laid the groundwork for nursing research. Her commitment to evidence-based practice not only improved patient care but also set a precedent for nurses to engage in research to inform their practice. Her approach to research has evolved into a cornerstone of nursing, influencing studies that continually shape healthcare outcomes.

Nightingale's influence on specialization lies in her belief in continuous learning and adaptation. Just as she adapted her methods to the unique challenges of her time, modern nurses are encouraged to adapt to the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare, embracing new technologies and techniques to provide the best possible care. Beyond her contributions to nursing practice and education, Florence Nightingale's legacy includes her role as an advocate and leader ^[6]. Her tireless efforts to improve healthcare systems and conditions for patients set an example for nurses to be advocates for their patients and their profession. She demonstrated that nurses possess a unique perspective that can influence healthcare policies and practices at both the individual and societal levels.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of nursing from a casual caregiving practice to a respected and crucial profession is a testament to the legacy of Florence Nightingale. Her commitment to evidence-based practice, education, professionalism, specialization and advocacy has left an indelible mark on the field. As nurses continue to adapt to the ever-changing healthcare landscape, they carry forward Nightingale's principles, ensuring that her influence remains relevant and impactful in nursing practice, education and leadership. Florence Nightingale's legacy is not merely a historical footnote but a guiding light that illuminates the path toward excellence in nursing care. In today's healthcare environment, nurse leaders are crucial in shaping policies, driving quality improvement initiatives and championing patient-centered care. Nightingale's legacy of advocacy and leadership continues to inspire nurses to take on these roles and make a lasting impact on the healthcare landscape.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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