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International Collaboration and Graduate Programs in Nursing Administration

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Nursing management or nursing administration, as a field of study or graduate program, offers the opportunity to examine issues influencing quality and security of care provided in a country that could result into policies. Graduate programs in nursing management or nursing administration could benefit from an international collaboration that would bring expertise from other countries and programs to support what one university can offer, regardless of its size. The present reflection will contribute to a more general discussion on issues that may be of interest for a post-graduate program specialized in nursing management. For that purpose, it will present a general perspective on nursing administration content, the context in which an international network in nursing management could exist, some examples of what a foreign faculty could bring to another and finally explore the possibilities of collaboration and implementation based on previous experiences.

Before examining a possible collaboration between universities regarding the program, it is important to have a clear understanding of its content or field of study. At University of Sao Paulo (USP), the expression *nursing management* is used, but elsewhere it is the expression *nursing administration* that is used. The latter refers to the *factors and mechanisms related to the structure, process and outcomes of nursing care and nursing services*⁽¹⁾ and aim at obtaining the best patients and nurses outcomes. Ultimately, nursing administration content translates into policies that have an influence on efficiency, efficacy and quality of nursing services⁽¹⁾. Alternatively, researchers⁽²⁾ propose a conceptual framework that views nursing administration as an open system with four interdependent core components – patients' health care needs, nursing resources, nursing care processes and outcomes that are influenced by both: the health care organization and the political, social, cultural and economic environment.

In this perspective, a graduate program in nursing administration should offer opportunities to study different topics integrating the many aspects of the health care system, such as quality of care, productivity of nursing care, quality of the working environment, and nurse-sensitive outcomes⁽¹⁻²⁾. It should also offer the opportunity to familiarize with politics and analysis of policies, since nursing administration influences them as well as being influenced by them. In sum, nursing administration is an area of specialization that encompasses content essential to health care delivery, but the diversity of knowledge and skills involved in nursing administration makes it difficult for a particular institution to be successful in attracting specialists from every field and to offer a high level of expertise on all the topics related to nursing administration.

Health care delivery and nursing administration are influenced by information from different countries that could be highly specialized and cover a large spectrum of interest, and for those reasons, international collaboration could provide ways to face new challenges. This type of collaboration is particularly pertinent for universities wishing to offer new opportunities to their students, expertise from other universities that is not currently available and *new ideas, methods and resources*⁽³⁾. This is even more appropriate for two universities that already have a general agreement for collaboration as it is the case for the University of Sao Paulo (USP) and Université Laval. Consequently, the perspective of a similar program offered in both universities could be attractive for students looking at increased mobility. From the institution perspective, it increases the opportunities to offer courses using videoconferencing and to have experts from both universities participate in thesis committee, research projects, organization of scientific activities and publication. So, for a field of study covering so many issues, an international collaboration could consolidate the programs of the universities involved.

Since the School of Nursing at USP is in the process of reviewing its graduate program in nursing management by examining how they could incorporate international trends, it would be pertinent to describe briefly the programs offered at the Université Laval's Faculty of Nursing and a consortium on nursing administration. There are two ways to complete the master program: 1. One focused on a clinical intervention and an essay; 2. A second one focused on research with a master thesis. Both programs cumulate a total of 45 credits (one credit = 45 hours/term; one term = 15 weeks). The required credits are usually divided in blocks of three credits for the coursework, the rest being for the thesis or the clinical intervention and essay. In the clinical-based program, 27 credits of coursework are required plus an activity involving the preparation and application of an intervention. The essay should focus on the intervention and show reflection as well as an analysis of the intervention. In

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the research-based program, one has to complete 21 credits of coursework and 24 credits of thesis. The thesis should be a supervised research that will provide a good understanding of the research process. At this level, no contribution to knowledge is expected. More specifically, when a graduate student is in nursing administration, both intervention and research have to focus on issues related to that field.

The Faculty of Nursing (Université Laval) is part of a centre dedicated to applied research and expertise in nursing administration: the FERASI Centre. The FERASI Centre has been created in September 2001 as a response to an increasing awareness of the importance of nursing services for health care delivery (http://www.ferasi.umontreal.ca/eng/02_partenaires/organismes.shtml). FERASI is a consortium of two Faculties of nursing (Université de Montréal and Université Laval), a School of Nursing (McGill University) with the addition a few years ago of the School of Nursing (Université de Sherbrooke). The centre is funded by a grant from the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF), the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) and support from the Fonds de Recherche en Santé du Québec (FRSQ), the four universities and their decision makers partners. The FERASI Centre is part of a Canadian network (CADRE) made up of 4 training centres and 12 research chairs funded by the CHSRF and CIHR. The FERASI Centre's activities are developed around the following themes: nursing services organization; policies related to nursing administration; nursing workforce development; and knowledge transfer. Through training, research and transfer of expertise and knowledge based on the Centre's three poles of expertise, FERASI aims at creating a network of excellence in nursing administration whose influence will extend not only to Quebec, but the rest of Canada and beyond.

For the last decade, the centre has been offering three doctoral seminars embedded in the graduate programs of the participating universities to students from the consortium and all those interested in nursing administration. In the last five years, the seminars have been offered using videoconferencing to attract students without requiring that they travel from one city to another since the seminars are offered by three universities located in two different cities.

More specifically, the students enrolled in a graduate program, have to focus on a topic related to nursing administration for their research or intervention project. Also, since the mission of FERASI is to build a research capacity in applied research related to nursing administration and to ensure knowledge transfer, students have to partner with a decision-maker that will provide a training opportunity by getting them involved in nursing administration. During the training and the pairing with the decision makers, students have to offer knowledge transfer activities related to their coursework and to their research interest. For those enrolled in a non-thesis program, they have to plan, with the decision-maker a 12 weeks placement (or residency) whose topics and activities have to be decided in collaboration with the academic director, the decision maker and the students. This placement has to meet the academic requirements of the program and should be analyzed in an essay.

As shown by the programs offered at Université Laval and by the existence of the FERASI Centre in the province of Quebec, nursing administration has offered opportunities to students for the last decade.

There is a scarcity of resources and expertise in nursing administration and collaboration among Quebec's universities provide a good example of what could be accomplished through international collaboration among universities situated in different countries.

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