

# NURSE'S ROLE IN THE TREATMENT OF CHRONIC WOUNDS

*PROTAGONISMO DO ENFERMEIRO DIANTE O TRATAMENTO DE FERIDAS CRÔNICAS*

*EL PAPEL DE LAS ENFERMERAS EN EL TRATAMIENTO DE LAS HERIDAS CRÓNICAS*

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## ABSTRACT

Analyze in the scientific literature what has been produced about the role of nurses in the treatment of chronic wounds. Literature review with a qualitative approach, carried out in the databases Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO), Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (Medline), Nursing Database (BDEnf). Ten articles were part of the sample. We found technical weaknesses and general knowledge about the prevention, treatment and recovery of chronic wounds linked to academic training and some challenges for professionals to preserve their autonomy. If it is necessary to train nurses to make decisions, carry out procedures and manage their team, this preparation should start during graduation, making the professional develop skills to deal with the management of chronic skin lesions and improve critical capacity reflective.

**Keywords:** *Nursing Care; Wounds; Professional Autonomy.*

## RESUMO

Analisar na literatura científica o que vem sendo produzido sobre o protagonismo do enfermeiro diante o tratamento de feridas crônicas. Revisão de literatura com abordagem qualitativa, realizada nas bases de dados Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO), Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde (LILACS), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (Medline), Base de Dados de Enfermagem (BDEnf). Fizeram parte da amostra 10 artigos. Foram encontradas fragilidades técnicas e de conhecimentos em geral sobre prevenção, tratamento e recuperação de feridas crônicas ligadas à formação acadêmica e alguns desafios para que o profissional tenha sua autonomia preservada. Se faz necessária uma capacitação do enfermeiro para tomar decisões, realizar procedimentos e gerenciar sua equipe. Essa preparação deve ser iniciada durante a graduação, fazendo com que o profissional desenvolva habilidades para lidar no manejo de lesões cutâneas crônicas e melhore a capacidade crítico reflexiva.

**Descritores:** *Cuidados de Enfermagem; Feridas; Autonomia profissional.*

## RESUMEN

Analizar en la literatura científica lo producido sobre el papel de la enfermera en el tratamiento de heridas crónicas. Revisión bibliográfica con abordaje cualitativo, realizada en las bases de datos Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO), Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Sistema de recuperación y análisis de literatura médica en línea (Medline), base de datos de enfermería (BDEnf). Diez artículos formaron parte de la muestra. Encontramos debilidades técnicas y de conocimiento general sobre la prevención, tratamiento y recuperación de heridas crónicas vinculadas a la formación académica y algunos desafíos para que los profesionales preserven su autonomía. Si es necesario capacitar a los enfermeros para tomar decisiones, realizar procedimientos y administrar su equipo, esa preparación debe comenzar durante la graduación, haciendo que el profesional desarrolle habilidades para lidiar con el manejo de las lesiones cutáneas crónicas y mejore la capacidad crítica reflexiva.

**Descritores:** *Cuidado de Enfermera; Heridas; Autonomía Profesional.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Chronic wounds are defined as any interruption in the continuity of the skin, to a greater or lesser extent, resulting from trauma or clinical conditions, presenting a difficult healing process. Studies show that by 2050, approximately 25% of the Brazilian population will develop chronic skin lesions. This condition is associated with different factors, such as: vascular impairments, Systemic Arterial Hypertension, Diabetes Mellitus, neuropathies, prolonged immobility, nutritional disorders and neoplasms, requiring specialized treatment with continuous, accurate and objective evaluation <sup>1</sup>.

For this treatment, care should be individualized, taking into account the patient as a whole, their desires and beliefs, as well as their socioeconomic status. Thus, it is necessary for nursing professionals to know the risk and anatomical-physiological factors considered fundamental to diagnose the type of injury and the best therapeutic approach to be followed. Prevention and treatment actions should be dynamic and need to be in accordance with scientific indications and available technology, giving autonomy and control to nurses<sup>2</sup>.

With regard to nursing care in the treatment process of patients with chronic wounds, it begins with the evaluation of the patient's history. It is important to note that each patient is unique, and this step should happen before the interventions. When performing the treatment, the nurse must be equipped with technical and scientific skills to evaluate the lesion and indicate the best way to conduct the treatment, providing an ideal environment to stimulate healing. Thus, therapeutic planning depends on the complete anamnesis of the individual, as well as on regular evaluations, systemic factors, and the location of the wound<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, in order for the healing process to happen properly and in order, a qualified assessment is necessary, identifying which stage of healing the wound is in, to perform actions that meet the needs of the wound. Healing is optimized and the healing process advances when the potential for infection is eliminated, the cleaning procedure involves everything from the choice of the solution to the method to perform the hygiene, always considering the patient's benefits and the reduction of traumas arising from the technique.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the above, nurses play an important role in the management of patients with chronic injuries. In this sense, it is necessary for these professionals to develop their clinical, technical and scientific skills, since it is essential to use measurement instruments, scales, protocols and clinical guidelines to assist in the process and develop diagnoses, assess risks, plan and implement care.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, nursing stands out, a profession whose leadership figure is occupied by nurses, who are often the protagonists of care in various sectors, from hospital care to primary care. To this end, in addition to providing care, they must act in the management of people, materials, resources, as well as in leadership, in the planning of care and in the development of their entire team.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, nurses may encounter several difficulties in performing wound care autonomously, such as weaknesses in the academic training process, decision-making, updated knowledge on the subject, and processing techniques. Thus, the following question arose: What aspects are described in the scientific literature that permeate the role of nurses in the treatment of conical wounds?

The desire for the development of the present study was due to the need for nurses to have a more in-depth contact with this theme, in order to establish autonomous and effective care. In addition, the experience in the internship field allowed us to perceive the lack of knowledge on the subject on the part of nursing professionals, who deal directly with wounds, thus generating ineffective conducts that often end up causing damage to the healing process.

Thus, the study becomes important for the community, since the qualified professional will provide more appropriate care, reducing complications and consequently the healing time. In addition, the research can serve as a reflexive and critical means for academics in the area, emphasizing the importance of developing protagonism during the training of students with regard to wound care, an area that is part of the basis of the profession, present in the various fields of activity.

It also becomes relevant for health professionals and management, in view of the importance of developing skills and competencies aimed at autonomy and protagonism in decision-making that will allow nursing care centered on evidence-based interventions.

In this context, the present study aimed to analyze in the scientific literature what has been produced about the role of nurses in the treatment of chronic wounds.

## METHODS

This is an Integrative Literature Review study with a qualitative approach. The integrative review research is based on the grouping of studies related to the theme of interest, seeking a concise synthesis of the phenomena exposed in the studies included in the sample, crossing the limits of the areas studied, including knowledge beyond health and education.<sup>7</sup>

The organizational steps for conducting an integrative study were followed: identification of the theme and selection of the hypothesis or research question; establishment of criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies/sampling or literature search; definition of the information to be extracted from the selected studies/categorization of the studies; evaluation of the studies included in the integrative review; interpretation of the results; presentation of the review/synthesis of knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

In this sense, the qualitative approach employs several philosophical conceptions, investigation tactics, and data collection, analysis, and understanding procedures. Despite being similar, the qualitative methods are based on text and image data, obtain from singular steps in data analysis and are aided by different research strategies.<sup>9</sup>

The guiding question defines one of the most important phases for the review, as it determines what will be addressed in the study, as effective as the information that will be collected in the face of the chosen theme.<sup>10</sup>

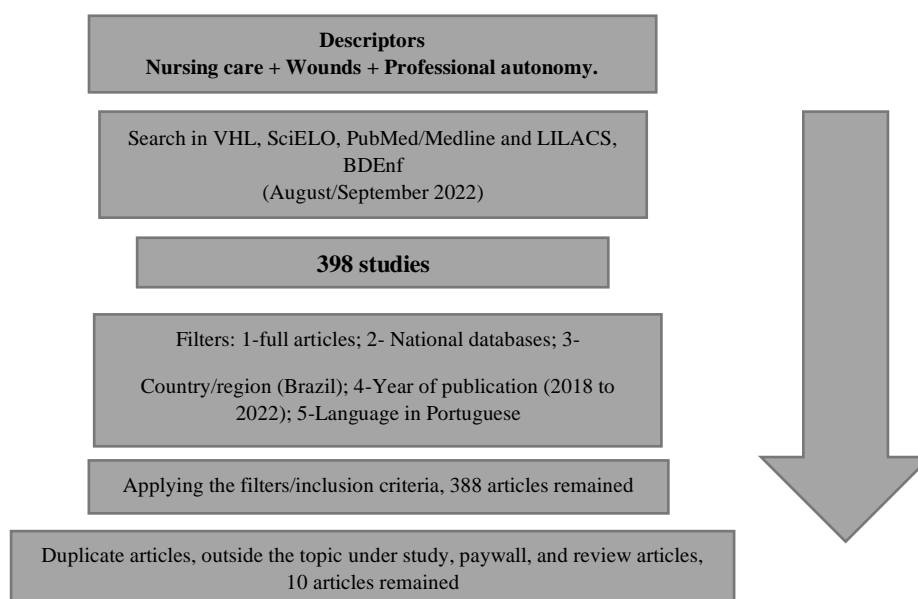
Thus, the present study was based on the following guiding question: what has been produced about the role of nurses in the treatment of chronic wounds?

Based on the guiding question, the search for studies was carried out in the following databases: *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SCIELO), *National Library of Medicine* (PubMed), *Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature* (LILACS), *Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online* (Medline), *Nursing Database* (BDEnf) using the *Health Science Descriptors* (DeCS): "Nursing care";

"Wounds" and "Professional Autonomy". Among the descriptors for the search of articles, the Boolean operator "AND" was applied, described in Table 3, as follows:

The search in the databases took place during the month of August and September 2022. To choose the research studies (**figure 1**), the following inclusion criteria were used: complete articles, available in Portuguese, published in the period from 2018 to 2022. The choice of the time frame is justified by the fact that in 2018 the Federal Council of Nursing (COFEN) instituted Resolution 567/2018, which determines and develops the performance of nursing in the area of wounds. The following articles were excluded: duplicate articles, articles outside the theme under study, paywall, and review articles.

**Figure 1: Flowchart for the selection of the studies that made up the integrative review.**



**Source:** research authors.

In the search for the studies that made up the research, it became possible to identify a total of 398 articles. After a thorough reading of the studies and their filtering, 388 articles were excluded, leaving 10 articles.<sup>9</sup>

The results were explored according to Bardin's Content Analysis technique<sup>12</sup>, which are divided into three phases, the first; Pre-analysis and search of articles with the theme in question. Performing a quick reading, and choosing the ones that best suit the study.

The second phase is the organization of the files that will be selected for the research, which obey the rules of authenticity and veracity, so that the results come out in the best possible way. The third refers to the treatment of the results obtained in a technical and scientific way through the author's understanding, enabling the reading and reflexive critical comprehension of the text.<sup>12</sup>

The evaluation of the works determined the reading and re-reading of the selected articles, in order to obtain greater depth in the data collection. For this, a data collection form was used, adapted to direct the reading and collaborate for the extraction of the data, where it was adapted from the model of the collection instrument elaborated and validated

by Ursi, which included his integrative review on the prevention of skin lesions in the perioperative period.<sup>13</sup>

## RESULTS

The evaluation of the studies and tabulation of the data were done by means of an adapted tool, through the data collection instrument validated by Ursi<sup>13</sup>, which addresses the order, authors, title, year of publication, type of study, objective and results, as shown in **Table 4**. Through rigorous reading and cataloguing of the studies, a more comprehensive view of the theme was obtained.

**Table 4 – Characterization of the selected studies.**

Order	Authors	Securities	Year	Type of study	Objective	Results
A1	SIQUEIRA, C.L., <i>et al.</i>	Knowledge of nurse managers about managerial competencies: a qualitative study.	2018	Qualitative	To identify the knowledge of nurses in charge of technicians in relation to the general and managerial competencies necessary to perform this function.	Two categories stood out: Core competencies To exercise the position of technical manager: leadership, interpersonal relationship and systemic view and Developing skills: dissociation between theory and practice.
A2	SCHMIDT, F.M.Q., <i>et al.</i>	Nursing staff's knowledge of care for patients with neoplastic wounds.	2020	Observational and cross-sectional study	To evaluate the knowledge of the nursing staff of an oncology hospital about the care of patients with Malignant Neoplastic Wounds (MNF) and to analyze associated sociodemographic and educational factors.	Lack of knowledge of the team regarding fundamental aspects in the management of these injuries. Despite the average time of work of the participants in Oncology, of approximately five years, and the acquisition of knowledge about wounds through participation in events related to the theme, nurses presented a proportion of correct answers above 80% only in five (questions 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) of the 11 questions evaluated. The nursing technicians presented correct answers above 70% in three questions (4, 6, 9).
A3	Perez, M.A.A.; Pam, L.; Brand, M.A.G.	Professional autonomy as a centrality in Good Nursing Practices	2020	Theoretical-reflexive study.	To reflect on professional, user and family autonomy as a central feature in Good Nursing Practices in Brazil	From a retrospective look at the creation and evolution of autonomy in Nursing in its knowledge and care practices, it exposes the use of autonomy in nursing care and the promotion of the participation of users and their families as the center of Good Nursing Practices. Nursing.
A4	COSTA, C.C.P., <i>et al.</i>	Stomatherapists in the world of work: facilities and difficulties for professional practice	2021	Qualitative research	To analyze the facilities and difficulties perceived by graduates of a postgraduate course in Stomatherapy to work in the world of work	The following facilities were apprehended: recognition of the specialist, availability of care technologies. The following were mentioned as hindering factors: lack of human and material resources, low remuneration of specialists, unfavorable institutional policies, and lack of appreciation of stoma therapists.

A5	GUALDEZI, L.F.	Competencies of nurses in advanced nursing practices in primary health care	2021	Exploratory study	To analyze the competencies required for advanced nursing practice in primary health care.	Primary Health Care nurses partially or incompletely develop activities that are close to advanced nursing practices. These professionals demonstrated some weaknesses that demand, even before the possibility of the implementation and regulation of advanced practices in Brazil, the development of these competencies. Such competencies should be discussed and fostered when creating and planning the training of these professionals, following the international criteria of the area.
A6	SILVA FILHO, B.F., et al.	Nurses' autonomy in the care of people with chronic injuries	2021	Theoretical-conceptual study	To reflect on the autonomy of nurses in the care of people with chronic injuries.	Nurse autonomy should not override patient autonomy. Through educational actions, the heterogeneity of roles should be considered to ensure the integrity of the patient and guarantee therapeutic adherence, emphasizing the importance of co-responsibility in the healing process.
A7	FIGUEIREDO, S.V., et al.	Management of pressure ulcers in patients under palliative care: nurses' view	2021	Qualitative study.	To understand the management of pressure ulcers in patients under palliative care from the perspective of nurses.	Two categories were listed: Nursing management of pressure injuries in patients under palliative care and Outcome of pressure injuries in patients under palliative care. The management of these occurs through individualized care, which may vary according to the different moments in which that individual is, and should be malleable. Three outcomes were also observed: complete healing, clinical improvement, and clinical stabilization.
A8	SOARES, C.F., et al.	Matrix nursing support as an innovation in the care of people with wounds	2021	Experience report	To report the professional experience of nurses in the implementation of matrix nursing support in the care of people with wounds in Primary Health Care.	The implementation resulted in the expansion of access to health services and the strengthening of the bond between the Family Health Strategy team and the injured person and their relatives. In addition, it provided the appropriate evaluation of lesions, shared care, clinical record of consultations, monitoring of data, and proper billing of dressings. Individualized assistance.
A9	SILVA, G.T.R., et al.	Management and leadership in the perception of nurses: a walk in the light of professional bureaucracy	2022	Exploratory and descriptive study.	To analyze the styles and factors involved in the management and leadership of nurses in three countries, Brazil, Portugal and Spain, in the light of Professional Bureaucracy.	Different perceptions about the integrating elements of participation were revealed in the three countries, highlighting communication from different perspectives. There were some convergences in relation to teamwork, with trust being the element that drives and motivates the team. It signals a participatory

						relationship in the development of the work
A10	FERNANDEZ-ARAQUE, A., et al.	Assessment of nurses' level of knowledge of the management of chronic wounds	2022	Cross-Sectional Study	To assess the level of knowledge about chronic wound management of post-graduate nurses in different areas of the health system	

**Source:** Adaptation of the instrument for data collection by URSI (2005).

Ten articles were used, of which one was published in 2018, two in 2020, five in 2021 and two in 2022. Given this, it was found that the year with the most publications was 2021, and the ones with the fewest were 2019 and 2022.

## DISCUSSION

Thus, from the treatment of the data, through thematic content analysis, three categories emerged, namely: *Category I - Knowledge of the nursing team about wounds*, *Category II - Factors that provide the autonomy of nurses in the care of chronic injuries* and *Category III - Challenges for nurses' autonomy*.

### CATEGORY I - NURSES' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHRONIC WOUNDS

Scientific knowledge gives nurses more confidence in decision-making, both in relation to the work team and to the patient, or even in relation to the administrative activities of the health institution itself. It is shown to be the necessary condition for this professional to have the initiative to conduct and make decisions.

In view of these findings, with regard to the management of chronic wounds, it is part of the nurse's daily routine, since it is their responsibility to provide care and appropriate techniques for the treatment of these injuries. Knowledge about this topic is important, since it is their responsibility to control the team and the positive prognosis of patients with chronic injuries.<sup>14</sup>

There are some difficulties that become more evident when it comes to knowledge and techniques, related to the training process of these professionals, both in the traditional way and in periods such as the one experienced during remote teaching in the Covid-19 Pandemic, where intrinsic issues of students, such as autonomy, time management and focus on the search for knowledge, came to the fore as problematic for learning. These difficulties are related to the lack of preparation for the choice of the appropriate dressing, basic notions about healing, wound classification, methods to prevent bleeding and measures to control odor.<sup>15</sup>

The study conducted by Fernandez-Araque *et al*<sup>16</sup> with nurses who work in the health system in areas that care for patients with chronic wounds in social, primary and hospital care in Australia, for example, found a low level of knowledge about the treatment of chronic wounds in general. Data on knowledge, according to the area of activity, showed that primary care nurses had greater knowledge about the etiology of wounds; those working in health and social assistance were the most knowledgeable about diagnostic knowledge; hospital nurses had less general knowledge.

With regard to Brazilian public/collective health, professional performance requires constant training and improvement that corroborate a better response to

treatment; however, it depends on several factors, such as the availability of quality materials/products, the patient's financial condition, family support, overload, and work environment. Such challenges demonstrate a care that needs updating, for example, patients with chronic injuries who spend months in treatment to achieve healing, favoring the risk of infection, loss of function, impaired mobility, low self-esteem, amputations and consequently permanent damage that directly influences quality of life.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, nurses demonstrate weaknesses that go beyond simple competencies, the problem is in educational institutions, where they train unqualified and unprepared professionals to deal with wounds. In addition, the lack of knowledge ranges from the evaluation to the choice of the appropriate treatment for each type of wound, reducing the chances of a positive outcome and consequently increasing the healing time.<sup>18</sup>

In this case, the standardization of nursing curriculum education is the way out, so that professionals, although trained in different institutions, have the same curriculum, and therefore the opportunity to acquire the same knowledge, continuing to exhibit good care practices in health care. It can also have an impact on the epidemiological health situation in Brazil, thus generating a new view of nursing as a profession in society.<sup>19</sup>

#### *CATEGORY II - FACTORS THAT PROVIDE NURSES' AUTONOMY IN THE CARE OF CHRONIC INJURIES*

Among the findings, we can see the construction of action plans based on the Systematization of Nursing Care and the Nursing Process, the use of knowledge from semiology and educational actions that aim to make the patient adhere to the treatment.

From this perspective, nurses become autonomous when they act with awareness of their work environment and aim at both their own satisfaction and that of those who have their work, always considering the importance of their actions towards people, work methods and health services. As a member of the team, this professional is essential in the construction of protocols and in the evaluation, selection and indication of new technologies in the treatment and prevention of chronic wounds.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the care of patients with chronic wounds is a dynamic and individualized process, therefore, the ability demonstrated by the nursing team is essential for monitoring and ensuring the quality of treatment. This perspective is represented through the use of knowledge of semiology and semiotechnics, which provide a comprehensive evaluation.<sup>21</sup>

In this way, the use of this knowledge makes the nurse treat the patient taking into account his totality, his desires as far as possible and measuring his expectations, making the client have a perspective of the reality in which he is inserted, with this, the professional has the ability to correctly evaluate and indicate the best interventions to follow the chosen therapy.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the nursing team, through educational actions, can ensure adherence to treatment, considering the heterogeneity of roles in the professional-patient bond. By following this principle, nurses will be able to provide care free of problems caused by carelessness.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, this care should be supported by interdisciplinary care plans to support the treatment of people with chronic injuries. It is worth noting that the nurse is the member



of the health team who performs the management in a more direct way to patients, therefore, it is essential to support their scientific evidence, with a view to continuous quality and safe care.<sup>23</sup>

From this perspective, some aspects of leadership during the nurse's work process, such as: team influencer, dialogue mediator, listening and motivating the development of professionals. In the same way, it points out management activities when supervising, planning and implementing instruments for the quality of care.<sup>24</sup>

In view of this, the Systematization of Nursing Care (NCS) and the Nursing Process (NP) should be applied to ensure care and support care. Thus, a union emerges between management and leadership in the daily routine of nursing, which, although different, are inseparable.<sup>25</sup>

### *CATEGORY III - CHALLENGES FOR NURSES' AUTONOMY*

In this context, the importance of nurses having their independence in the work process stands out, since it is a fundamental component for the maintenance of the legal achievements of the profession as a whole and directly implies decision-making for the construction of a more emancipated nursing and protagonist of health situations, showing that nurses must master the technique as well as scientific knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to the daily work, factors that hinder the autonomy of nurses in the care of chronic injuries are present, such as the lack of human resources, the scarcity of materials and equipment, as well as solutions and coverage. These difficulties are predominantly presented in the unfavorable institutional policy and economic configuration in the world of work, whose principles refer to the neoliberal idea, where it focuses on the reduction of expenses and not on the quality of the care provided.<sup>26</sup>

Another factor that interferes in the practice would be the lack of recognition by the team members, bringing a reflection in relation to the parameters that are being used for the selection of these professionals, suggesting that political indication was the main criterion used for the preference of participants in the health team. It is also important to emphasize that the competencies presented by these nursing professionals are not taken into account when talking about promotion to a leadership position.<sup>27</sup>

This fact causes unfair competition for employment, favoring those who have ties to certain politicians, and hindering those who really have the knowledge and deserve to assume such positions. Added to this, the large supply of professionals, decrease in job offers, has generated a reduction in salaries, apprehension and concern about the maintenance of the employment relationship.<sup>14</sup>

It is also worth noting that stable leadership contributes to teamwork and, consequently, to the achievement of better results, as it reduces conflicts, increases the commitment of employees in work processes, improves the use of resources and decreases the turnover rate.<sup>26</sup>

The conditions of the popular itinerary, the beliefs reinforced by the culture, the lack of knowledge about the therapies used in the treatment of chronic wounds and the lack of willingness of professionals to determine health education actions, prevent the patient's early access to care services.<sup>21</sup>

In this case, I should also emphasize the importance of assisting the patient in an individualized and systematized way, centered on the person with the wound, meeting their needs, treating them as human beings, knowing their desires and expectations. For this purpose, it is necessary for nurses to improve their ability to empathize and listen to them, valuing what is different in each patient.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study sought to understand the role of nurses in the treatment of chronic wounds. Thus, it can be seen that it was possible to learn about the various issues that are involved in the process of nursing autonomy, especially when it comes to the prevention and treatment of chronic wounds, as well as the path to be traced so that this professional actually has his recognition and occupies the space of relevance in the care of injuries.

In addition, this research evidenced a weakness linked to techniques and knowledge in general about chronic wounds. Such difficulties are based on the context of their training, where there is no methodology directed to professional skill and competence in the scope of autonomy in wound care.

On the other hand, taking into account the importance of scientific knowledge for care practice, in this search for studies, the importance of care implementation strategies such as the Systematization of Nursing Care (NCS) and the Nursing Process (NP) became clear, in addition to the implementation of intervention plans to achieve effective treatment, seeking autonomy in care and wound healing without any cognitive obstacles that prevent therapy.

Through this investigation, with the data collected, it became possible to understand the nurses' performance in the management of chronic wounds and the difficulties encountered for these professionals to have their autonomy. It is expected, from the development of this research, the interest in new research pertinent to the theme raised for discussion, collaborating with the scientific media.

Therefore, it is necessary to train nurses to make decisions, perform procedures and manage their team. This preparation should be initiated from graduation to professional practice, making the professional occupy all the spaces that are rightfully his/hers, and develop skills to deal with the management of skin lesions and improve critical reflective capacity, keeping up to date on new technologies and procedures carried out within this theme, knowing how to act coherently and safely, protecting the patient's life and always maintaining humanized and integral care centered on the patient-professional bond.

This study can serve as an analytical and reflective basis to provide improvements in the field of injury treatment of professional nurses. The limitations of the study include the limited availability of publications on the topic addressed. Thus, in order to better understand the role of nurses in the treatment of chronic wounds, it is recommended that broader studies be carried out, which can be carried out in conjunction with health institutions, aiming at an improvement in patient care, based on the nurse as the head of the nursing team and the director of the care provided.

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