



The role of nurses in assisting children with autism

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1 INTRODUCTION

Autism is characterized as a disorder that affects the developmental period causes delays and impairments in the areas of social interaction and language, including emotional, cognitive, motor and sensory symptoms (ASSUMPTION; BERNAL, 2018).

The United Nations (UN) in 2015 estimated that about 70 million people in the world had autism. In the 1950s and 1960s some studies on the etiology of autism, including those of the researcher Kanner, who attributed the origin of autism to the guilt of parents who were not emotionally involved with their children. What was called "refrigerator mother". However, with the advancement of new studies this belief was abandoned, where they found that autism affected children in all parts of the world, regardless of social level, race, religion or culture, being genetic or properly a brain disorder present since early childhood (BRASIL, 2015).

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) involves situations that fall into different levels of graduation, ranging from the lightest to the highest degree of commitment, relating to verbal and non-verbal communication difficulties (SILVA; MARTINS, 2003). The spectrum was discovered by the English scientist Isaac Newton (1642 - 1727), in observance of sunlight when crossing a prism refracted a spectrum of various colors, called the rainbow, and each color is a frequency and has a wavelength that goes from the smallest to the largest, measured in nanometer and symbolize part of an umbrella.

Andrade et al (2016) conceptualizes Autism Spectrum Disorder as persistent deficits in communication and social interaction in various circumstances and by presenting restricted and



repetitive patterns of behavior, interest or activities. These changes are usually present in children early in their development, thus causing considerable damage in their lives.

The characteristics of autism usually appear in the first years of life, but it is common for children to go through a period of normality before these symptoms are observed. Early on, what catches parents' attention is the calmness, sleepiness, crying and not accepting lap or snuggling. After that, parents realize that the baby does not imitate, does not learn to communicate by gestures, avoids or does not have eye contact. The changes presented in the routine usually cause discomfort and other signs appear such as stereotypes, gaze fixation, violent habits against oneself, such as biting, scratching, if and pulling hair (MELLO, 2016).

The Ministry of Health (MS), considers autism is a neuropsychiatric syndrome and because there is no specific etiology that identifies it, studies suggest the presence of some psychosocial, genetic and neurobiological risk factors that may be associated with anatomical or physiological anomaly of the Central Nervous System, innate constitutional problems, biologically predetermined. (BRASIL, 2013).

The Unified Health System (SUS), established in 1990 by Law 8.080, brought the responsibility to organize itself from the guidelines of decentralization, regionalization and social control and stressed that people should have easy access to health services and that all Brazilians can actively participate in building and qualifying this system (BRASIL, 2015).

Bearing in mind that health is a set of factors and that each individual has their history, their potential and their limitations and that everyone deserves attention focused on their particularities and needs, patients with ASD need and should have individualized support and care. There is no single approach to be applied in the care of people with ASD. It is recommended that its effectiveness and safety be considered and that it be carried out according to the uniqueness of each person involved in this care (BRASIL, 2015).

Law no. 12.764, of December 27, 2012, which protects the rights of the person with autism spectrum disorder, designated "National Policy for the Protection of the Rights of the Person with Autism Spectrum Disorder", in its article 3 reference that the person with autism spectrum disorder has the right to a dignified life, physical and moral integrity and the free development of personality, safety and leisure; to early diagnosis, multiprofessional care, information to assist in diagnosis and treatment; access to education, housing and insertion in the labor market, among others (BRASIL, 2012).

Sena et al (2015) state that the professional nurse can contribute positively to the diagnosis and treatment of ASD through the analysis of behaviors, glimpsed in the constant consultation during the child's growth.



The professional nurse has great competence for humanization of care which differentiates him from other professionals and this care certifies him to promote, according to his possibilities, better quality of life and well-being to the one under his assistance. (COSTA, 2018)

The Psychosocial Care Center (CAPS) is a diversified care network that offers a community service and operates with open doors, without barriers, facilitating access, promoting reception to people with intense suffering resulting from mental disorders and alcohol and drug use. It has a multiprofessional team to better welcome users (BRASIL, 2017).

CAPS are classified for better distribution and care to the population, in this scenario inserting adults and children. There is the CAPS for children (CAPSi), which serves children and adolescents who primarily present intense psychological distress, use of psychoactive substances, or other situations that may interfere with the individual's social relationships (BRASIL, 2017).

Patients diagnosed with autism need multidisciplinary support for their follow-up. Not only that, but also his family. Nursing is relevant in providing this care, assisting in promoting the development of the child, listening to family members, facilitating access to information about the disorder and promoting actions that provide the well-being of the patient and his family member by linking them to essential health services (EBERT; LORENZINI; SILVA, 2015).

2 OBJECTIVE

This research has, as justification, greater scientific deepening regarding nursing care for children with autism.

The objectives of this study are to identify the role and relevance of nursing professionals in assisting children diagnosed with Autism.

3 METHODOLOGY

Minayo (2017) states that the research approach proposed consists of a qualitative approach to the data where the investigation will be focused on the qualitative aspects of the desired theme. It is outlined the realization of a research of applied nature aiming to promote knowledge for practical applications to solve specific problems.

A search for articles was carried out in the Virtual Health Library (VHL) using the descriptors: "nursing", "autism", "assistance", associated with the Boolean operator AND from its confirmation in the Descriptors in Health Sciences (DECS).

In the databases Online Medical Literature Search and Analysis System (MEDLINE), we found 43 articles, of which three were selected; in the Virtual Library of Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Science (LILACS), seven files were obtained and of these, two are within the scope of the research, in the Nursing Database (BDENF), seven articles were filtered, but of these, five



are related to our study and in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) of the six articles searched, two were related to the theme and in PUBMED eight products were found, only one was relevant to our research.

Two types of criteria were adopted: inclusion and exclusion. In the first: articles related to the theme of this study, in Portuguese, English and Spanish, full text and with a time frame from 2015 to 2019. In the second: articles repeated in more than one database and articles that were not free for their visualization and those that did not correspond to the guiding question of the research.

To search for articles, the descriptors were used individually, using the filters according to the two criteria mentioned.

The following table shows the state of the art, in a synthetic way, the 14 articles selected and published between the years 2015 to 2019.

Table 01

Article	Year	Periodicals	Level of Evidence	PERIODICAL	Evidence
Childhood autism: impact of diagnosis and repercussions on family relationships.	2016	SCIELO	Description	Gaúcha Journal of Nursing	This study affirmed the importance that all necessary clarifications are made and the doubts and anxieties of the family members involved are clarified, between nurses and other health professionals. And that, new strategies for improvements, actions and health interventions will be created in this area.
Systematic review of medical home models to promote transitions to adult primary health care for adolescents living with autism spectrum disorder.	2015	MEDLINE	Description	Sigma Theta Tau International	Nursing professionals working in the field of pediatrics are in a prime position to provide leadership within interdisciplinary teams and develop a patient-centered transition model for children, adolescents, and young adults who are diagnosed with autism. And to develop health policies to support the transition of health services from adolescence to adulthood.
Autism in Brazil, family challenges and coping strategies: a systematic review	2015	SCIELO	Literature Review	Journal of Pediatrics	This study showed that the integrated action of professionals such as psychologists, nurses, doctors, speech therapists and teachers in the family dynamics provides an improvement in the quality of life and in the ability of caregivers to deal with the symptoms of ASD. In this way, network articulation, integrality and continuity of health services can compose a set of references with the capacity to welcome these children and their families.
Parent Perceptions of Care Received by Children With an Autism Spectrum Disorder	2016	SCIELO	Description	Journal of Pediatric Nursing	Nurses are appropriate professionals, through looking at parents' perceptions of caring for children with Autism to understand their life experience, unique challenges and unmet needs. Exploring parents' perceptions of addressing care deficits with great potential to positively or negatively affect the child and family functioning of children with Autism. Wellness promotion and holistic, multidimensional perspectives of patient care are hallmarks of advanced nursing practice.



Fathers' Experience With Autism Spectrum Disorder: Nursing Implications	2015	MEDLINE	Description	Journal of Pediatric Health Care	School nurses need to have comprehensive and accurate information related to the issue of motor, social, and emotional limitations of students on the autism spectrum so that they can act as knowledgeable team members and advocates for these students. Nurses have an important role as the eyes and ears of the healthcare team and the voice of the parents, thus creating a critical connection between parents and the healthcare team. Nurses can listen, educate, recognize and direct families of children with ASD through the challenges they face to improve outcomes and well-being for children with ASD and the entire family.
Nursing students' knowledge of autistic disorders	2019	BDENF	Description	Revista de enfermagem on line UFPE	In this research, it was emphasized the importance of further study on Autism Spectrum Disorders in undergraduate courses, taking into account their prevalence and complexity, so that nursing students, future professionals, have more security and knowledge to perform ethical and evidence-based care for people with autistic disorders in the broadest areas of health care.
Self-care of children with autism spectrum through Social Stories	2017	BDENF	Description	Anna Nery School online journal	The application of the Self-Care Theory made it possible to establish diagnoses, interventions and results that, by contemplating the steps proposed by Orem and inserting Social Stories in the child's context, made it possible to achieve the child's engagement in self-care. There was an evolution of the child from the partially compensatory system to the support-education system, due to the positive evolution of self-care capacity in bathing, tooth brushing and hygiene after intestinal eliminations.
Musical intervention as a nursing care strategy for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a Psychosocial Care Center	2016	LILACS	Experience Report	Text and context Nursing online	The experience of using music as a nursing technology in the care of autistic children at CAPSi Plano Piloto was positive, it provided new ways of doing/playing, developing skills and relating to others, that is, it is a nursing intervention that provided interaction, new behaviors and language stimulation. And, it contributed to improve verbal and non-verbal communication, break with isolation patterns, minimized stereotyped behaviors, stimulated self-expression and the manifestation of subjectivity.
Mothers of children with autistic disorder: perceptions and trajectories	2015	PUBMED	Description	Gaúcha Journal of Nursing	This study reveals the importance of training nurses to better care for children with autism and their families during the nursing consultation and during ongoing staff training. Increased awareness and training of professionals involved in care should be carried out to provide greater support, effective assessments and monitoring of childhood behavior and development, and qualified assistance that considers the needs of children with autism and their families.
Practice and knowledge of nurses about child autism	2015	BDENF	Exploratory Study	Research Journal: Care is Fundamental Online	The results of this research revealed that it is noticeable the great ignorance of nurses about childhood autism, given the few characteristics reported to them about this pathology. This can be understood by the fact that autism has a wide variety of signs and symptoms, in addition to its various etiologies. However, the results also clarify that the curricula of the nursing area work little with the theme or do not expose it. The



					constant search for knowledge and updates, and development work contributes to knowledge, encourages the realization of permanent and permanent education in health that make the subjects. Vsito that, autism is gaining more visibility because the understanding that it is a syndrome that leads to social exclusion, leads to a degrading developmental deficit in important areas of cognition and learning. Highlight was given, when caring for an autistic, the community in which it is inserted, to be concerned with the deconstruction of prejudices and the formulation of new concepts and a better quality of life, because being a nurse is caring to know, value and produce new forms of knowledge / nursing.
Autistic spectrum disorder: early detection by nurses in the Family Health Strategy / Autistic spectrum disorder: early detection by Family Health Strategy Nurses	2018	BDENF	Descriptive Study	Baiana Journal of Nursing	This study revealed that nurses, from this study, who provide care in the Family Health Strategy had deficiencies in the early detection of Autism Spectrum Disorder in children. And that for the performance in this scenario this professional is trained to exercise this work effectively, since the treatment can be started the earlier the ASD is identified.
Practice and knowledge of nurses about child autism / La práctica y el conocimiento de las enfermeras acerca del autismo infantil / Practice and knowledge of nurses about child autism	2015	LILACS	Explorator y study	UFRJ Research Journal	This study found a lack of knowledge among the nurses interviewed about childhood autism and the absence of practical interventions carried out with autistic people and their families, in addition to the lack of training on the subject.

4 DEVELOPMENT

Pinto (2016) showed that the necessary clarifications should be made and the doubts and anxieties of the family members involved should be clarified between nurses and other health professionals. And that new improvement strategies, actions and health interventions will be created in this area.

Rodrigues et al. (2017), Halpin (2016) and Bekhet (2013) stated that it is important to support the family in caring for children with autism and the inclusion of parents in the process, emphasizing that it is in the family that the main caregivers are found. In line with this thought, Halpin (2016) states that it is possible to understand how much these people need the attention of the nurse. It is important that this professional considers the opinion of the child's parents so that he can initiate interventions. Therefore, the relevance of communication with the family and paying attention to their complaints and difficulties.

Russel and McCloskey (2016) cited in their study that nurses are appropriate professionals, through looking at parents' perceptions of care for children with Autism to understand their life experiences, unique challenges and unmet needs. They are extremely relevant in the process of parents' perceptions to address care deficits with great potential to positively or negatively affect the child's development and promote family well-being.



Gomes et al (2015) revealed in their research that the integrated performance of professionals such as psychologists, nurses, doctors, speech therapists and teachers in family dynamics provides an improvement in the quality of life and in the ability of caregivers to deal with the symptoms of ASD. In this way, network articulation, integrality and continuity of health services can compose a set of references with the capacity to welcome these children and their families.

The guidelines for attention to the rehabilitation of the person with autism spectrum disorder the Ministry of Health recommend that during the nursing consultation in front of the child with suspected ASD, the nurse can track, through instruments the clinical indicators of developmental changes that signal dysfunctions for the disorder such as: IRDI (Clinical Indicators of Risk for Development) and M-Chat (Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers). For this, it is important that the nurse is attentive to the growth and development of the child, since his perception as a professional will help in the early discovery of autism (BRASIL, 2014).

According to Carniel (2014), the evolution of signs and symptoms of ASD occur from birth to 15 months, presenting problems and difficulties of feeding and breastfeeding; apathetic, show no desire for affection and affection; cry a lot, or do not cry; has no interest in people and the environment; has unusual fear of strangers; present the movements repeatedly as; swing their hands; show interest in certain objects, devices and games obsessively; do not like to change the physical environment insisting on your desire; present impaired sleep. From 18 months to 2 years of age, they have difficulty with hygiene and sphincter control; as for food, they show strange preferences; they may have absent speech or delayed speech. After 2 years. Speech difficulty remains, word repetitions occur; problems with sphincter control and hygiene habits continue; they are unable to play common games; they may show motor and musical skills and insensitivity to pain.

Frye (2015), Ferreira; Franzoi (2019) stated in their research that nurses need more comprehensive information related to children with autism and that this theme should be more worked with nursing students. Sena (2015) corroborates this idea, as she states that the lack of training offered by services, focused on mental health, on ASD, limits the professional's performance. And these should occur, aiming at improving work activities, and can be carried out permanently in the service, in meetings rich in discussions of conduct among other professionals.

ASD has a diagnosis, only clinical, there are no laboratory or imaging tests that confirm it. The lack of knowledge about ASD by nursing professionals can cause damage to the child's development and treatment (SOUZA, 2017).

Autism can be easily confused with other pathologies, as it is a psychological and cognitive disorder, which makes it difficult to diagnose. The discovery of having a child with autism is not always well accepted by parents. Therefore, careful communication is necessary. The professional nurse has a fundamental role in this process, and must have the proper knowledge to differentiate autism from



other syndromes, know how to guide, support, be aware of the signs and symptoms, in addition to providing nursing care to the patient with autism and their families, aiming at the best treatment and quality of life (Costa et al, 2018).

Sousa (2017) and Silva et al., (2016) attest that professional nurses must have enough scientific theoretical knowledge to be able to identify early the obvious signs of autism, as it is the professional who accompanies this patient for the longest time. It should provide support to parents with regard to social interaction and the provision of care with regard to monitoring and appropriate treatment for autistic people.

Gomes et al. (2015) state that emotional overload can be reduced by sharing experiences between families living in the same situation, carried out by professional guidance to the family, access to entertainment activities and shared construction of care plans that allow family members access to information and tools that help them understand autism and the needs of their children, thus aiming to improve the social inclusion of the child and the family.

Children with ASD, in their first months of life, show signs and symptoms such as: social isolation, hypersensitivity, hypoactivity, hyperactivity, irritability, echolalia, repetitive and stereotyped movements, difficulty getting out of the routine and difficulty maintaining visual and gestural contact. They use inappropriate pronouns, when they start to speak, present atypical responses to visual or auditory stimuli, given the inability of social interaction both bodily and verbal that they have. Therefore, contact with people who are not their acquaintances is not established only through speech. The nurse must take a close look at these characteristics and seek ways and means to establish a relationship of trust and security to this child in the perspective of bonding (BAROSA, 2017).

Children with autism are very sensitive. He/she observes most of the information that reaches his/her senses, such as colors and sounds mainly, which sometimes causes great discomfort, and may cause inability to concentrate on something, causing isolation because he/she does not understand what is happening. They are children extremely obsessed with maintaining the scope without changes, and show great interest in circular movements, such as those present in fans or cataventos, being able to stay endless hours in front of them (SANTOS, 2018).

The earlier the diagnosis, the better the prognosis and treatment planning, and should be structured according to the patient's life stages. At this time, the role of nurses is very important, as it is up to them to intervene in the face of this disorder and provide assistance to the child and the family (SILA et al., 2016; MELO et al., 2017).

There are no specific medications for ASD, but pharmacological options that can alleviate the problems and symptoms most present in autism. These include anxiolytics, anticonvulsants and atypical antipsychotics such as risperidone. These medications are most used to reduce these symptoms



of anxiety, seizures and agitation, most common in individuals with autism (FERNANDES et al., 2017).

There are non-pharmacological forms already tested and that are alternatives to stimulate the development of a child with ASD, music therapy is an option. Almeida and Neves (2017) revealed that the musical instrument xylophone is able to allow the child with autism a way to know another sound and practice the rhythm, added to this the creation of bond with the music and with who is working with it.

According to a new study published in the journal *Neurology*, cannabidiol is effective in treating children with autism, in the symptom of anxiety. However, its access is difficult because there is a need for a prescription, prescription or medical report, specifying that it is the only, or at least the most appropriate, substance capable of solving the health problem of a given individual, required by Anvisa (BEZERRA, 2019).

Sudré et al., (2012) argue that the care of parents and guardians of children with autism represents a very important condition for the success of the treatment and that during the period of care for children, nurses should pay special attention to complaints related to the difficulties of parents and thus guide them adequately to deal with the temperament of their children.

According to Loureto and Moreno (2016) despite the difficulties, most families adapt to the new routines, through the family balance between the demands of the autistic child with the other members.

Thus, nurses must consider the complexity of ASD, the possible causes, the therapies with low responses and be prepared to intervene with the child and his family. They must have knowledge with innovations in care, and have a theoretical approach to nursing that enables children with ASD to self-care according to their potentialities and limitations, so that they can have autonomy in their daily lives (CARNIEL et al., 2015; ABREU; ANDRADE; TEODORO, 2012).

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this context, the nurse being a health professional who works in several fields, whether in Hospital Units, Caps, E-schools. It is extremely important to train professional nurses to work with this audience. In view of their legal commitment to health, in order to provide assistance based on the promotion, prevention, recovery and rehabilitation of these children and their caregivers. And it was mentioned by some authors that it is a theme that needs to be further worked on for nursing professionals.

There is little research in the field of nursing care for children with autism. This finding points to the need for further scientific deepening in this area.



Understanding the other and accepting the differences promotes motivation for a successful performance of the nursing professional and his team in the care of the autistic child. Due to this characteristic of withdrawal into his world, which belongs only to himself, this causes concern in parents and caregivers. Consequently, it requires more knowledge from all those involved in the autistic universe, including nursing professionals, so that they can provide welcoming, dignified and more humane assistance.



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