

# Phenomenology: comprehensive and Interpretative philosophy for Nursing Care

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## SUMMARY

**Introduction:** In nursing, thinking serves to discover or rediscover the sense of what we call concept; procedure, serves to establish what is phenomenologically manifested when searching the essence of form. To reflect on phenomenological perspective in the process of care affects both fulfillment and significant nursing practice. **Objective:** Presenting phenomenological philosophy through a comprehensive and interpretative healthcare perspective that describes the importance of its inclusion in the nursing care practice towards the comprehension of being. **Development:** Understanding the ailing person in full human dimension via reflective analysis, provides an established way to understand reality, delving more deeply into the internal sphere of things in order to appreciate their true being, leaving the external aside. The obvious, which begins with cause and effect, possesses a scientific structure to both interpret and comprehend the subjectivity of thought, discovering essential structures of conscience and establishing the social responsibility of nursing for the development of potentialities, capacities, and possibilities of the well-being of individuals and communities. **Conclusions:** Endless are the roads of nursing care. Presenting phenomenological philosophy provides tools to understand what human beings are able to establish within their environment during their search for health, based on a greater understanding about human existence and about being a nurse.

**Key words:** Philosophy; nursing; methodological research in nursing; qualitative research (DeCS; BIREME).

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## INTRODUCTION

Each encounter we have with health care is unique as it is a subjective experience, an interaction with non-visible aspects, where approach is not limited to mention or refer to someone, but is the answer to something; this silent experience shall envelop the purest expression of the self.

Parse<sup>(1)</sup> held that people should not be divided into spheres because the individual is more than the sum of its parts and nursing directs its gaze to the experience lived by him. He also points out that the relationship between the nurse and the patient flourishes when they treat each other as people avoiding the creation of prejudices and labels.

In order to achieve this understanding, phenomenology redefines knowledge and types of effective relationships between the subject and the object to show life experience including the meaning and understanding of the experience<sup>(2)</sup>.

Self-reflection allows us to make changes in a nurse's job towards a reflective practice<sup>(3)</sup>. It is a tool to restore health care with an intersubjective holistic intervention on the basis of open and significant dialogs where, when parting from the interaction (that by being in front of a person who needs health care), the nurse recognizes and differentiates the values and priorities of the patient that are different from his own, generating, in turn, new growth opportunities in line with the subject<sup>(4)</sup>.

In institutions where nursing care is provided, the patient is a passive entity that receives standardized and unidirectional procedures, treatments, and advice from the institution, characterized by not focusing on the human being as someone who is located in an environment, time, and space that define the patient and, at the same time, they themselves define and modify with their presence.

Phenomenology can become that guiding theme of thought that enables analysis where reason is not detached from emotion, neither the subject from the object, allowing both human beings to recognize their existence and fragility<sup>(5)</sup>.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to reflect on the comprehensive and interpretative philosophy involved in nursing care.

## DEVELOPMENT

The origins of our ideas and the multiple questions that arise from nursing in our day-to-day duties cannot be solved merely by scientific inquiry. Kikuchi<sup>(6)</sup> mentions that deviation in the interpretation of science by nurses and its resulting consequences will persist unless philosophy, as a means of inquiry, takes its corresponding place in the world of nursing, since only with philosophy, can we establish which questioning is susceptible of scientific research or not.

## *Philosophical Inquiry*

Philosophical inquiry begins at the most abstract level in order to find the meaning of things themselves in the light of root causes, while scientific inquiry analyzes objects from a single perspective investigating secondary principles; likewise, it has the responsibility and obligation to shape culture, since it is based on common sense. Furthermore, it contributes to the knowledge related to what happens around it, what humans look for and what humans must do. The common element between scientific and philosophical inquiry is their dependence on experience to develop concepts, formulate questionings, and the testing of propositions and theories<sup>(7)</sup>.

Philosophy is discursive and depends of common experience. Its falsehood or truthfulness cannot be demonstrated by calling on any kind of experience. It provides insight upon the root causes, solves conflict between different fields, and it can also guide individual and social conducts.

It can be said that philosophy focuses in the quest for knowledge". Its etymological roots mean "love of wisdom"; it investigates causes and laws underlying reality. It is divided into the following fields: logic, ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, metaphysics, axiology, politics, etc. Philosophy deals with understanding truth, reason, and the reality of human beings and determines the right way to live. Nursing benefits from philosophy by guiding its methods through logic and ethics<sup>(8)</sup>.

The philosophical inquiry in nursing allows us to be critical and systematize the knowledge that arises from empirical research, clinical practice, learning, and even from intuition itself. Philosophy is relevant to nursing since both share a humanistic sense in their endeavor and integrates diversity of thought. For example, creating nursing science through tacit knowledge and communicating it through explicit knowledge<sup>(9)</sup>.

Nature in a comprehensive manner provides unity to knowledge that guides the holistic interpretation of the central phenomenon of nursing. In that understanding, nursing moves beyond stereotypical perceptions, thus training the understanding of the hidden and real through phenomenology, opening to a new conception of the human being.

## *Phenomenology*

The word phenomenology comes from the Greek word "phenomenon", which means 'to show' and "logy" represents discourse or science. Phenomenology can be understood as the science that attempts to reveal or make visible realities through subjective experience, to attempt to find the reasons, not the causes of facts in order to achieve knowledge and understanding through real-life experience and return to these things themselves in order to see their manifestation<sup>(10)</sup>.

In search of the uniqueness of the phenomenon (its concept of ideality), nursing brings, as a language, the perceptions of the human experience in all types of phenomena. The philosophy involved in nursing care can be guided towards two aspects: 1) to have a mechanistic view that reflects reactivity, prioritizes knowledge, or it focuses on the human being and its expectations, allowing them to understand, interpret, and discover a meaning in life experiences. Freedom, understood as a choice and responsibility, is regarded as a stress process that contributes to the development in the profession<sup>(11)</sup>.

The field of nursing focuses on the human being while phenomenology strives towards the purely human. Both generate scientific knowledge, thus strengthening the nursing practice and in turn contribute to their respective development.

The new epistemological order does not consider the subject and the object independent from one another rather interlinked by a cognitive act. This approach allows us to interpret phenomena that arise from the subjectivity of people, and of the world around them, in search of the essence of people, their very being and of the processes involved.

Phenomenology and its subjective nature are linked to the very essence of the human being, allowing one to access various fields of care, as part of the world's time and space. The phenomenological approach visualizes the reality that is in the world, that is, care through experiences<sup>(12)</sup>.

This relationship produces an exchange, the subject, experiences and object, and the framework of which one exists as an entity. This approach seeks to redefine the shape of an effective relationship between the subject and the object, which takes place to proclaim the phenomenological contents. These phenomena are described consciously, without theories, without causalities, free of assumptions and prejudices.

Conscience in phenomenology means to expose oneself to the light, void of darkness, does not occur in the first look at the phenomenon, but develops gradually during the thoughtful and thorough search of the subject who inquires and attempts to see beyond appearance, emphasizing the search of the nature, basis, and essence of the phenomenon, that is to say, that which presents itself to the subject<sup>(13)</sup>. The patient is more than his biological data, he is also biography, and they do not just have an illness, but also have fears and expectations, a way of being.

In the case of the individual who receives healthcare, who can be found in cold hallways, enduring long waits and confusing diagnoses, it should also be revisited and considered what Husserl proposes, namely a "return to things themselves". This would help us to understand the purpose, the primary idea of phenomenology expressed as a substantial nature of the conscience that is established during the interaction with nursing in the moment of care.

## Care

Health care begins from the action to the being, built from the professional experience, which harbors special features when provided. Care is defined as an activity with personal and professional value aimed at the conservation, restoration, and self-care of life based on the nurse-patient relationship.

Collière<sup>(14)</sup>, anthropologist, nurse, and philosopher, states that "Caring is an act of life whose object is, above all, to allow life to continue and develop, and in that way fight against death of the individual, group, and species", thus understanding nursing care through the context or the process of life and death that humans face every day.

To provide care, as a nurse, commits the individual to self-knowledge and cognitive activities expressed during the moment of care by means of analysis, reflection, assessment, intuition, decision, and sensibility.

The nursing professional appreciates the person being cared for as a unit, highlighting the person-context interaction as a reciprocal evolution that transcends the person-nurse relationship and time and space limitations, where both persons develop<sup>(15)</sup>.

This view allows us to position ourselves towards each other with a higher order of understanding, using reflexive intuition to write and clarify the experience as seen by the caregiver and the person requiring care<sup>(16)</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Phenomenology enables nursing to have a unique and irreducible view of the patient, which responds simultaneously to stimuli and is self-organized by behaviors, qualities, and features of the environment along with a specific context where beliefs, subjective experiences, ideologies, intuition, among others, are considered. Additionally, it serves to provide answers to questions related to situations that were experienced as part of the human health experience.

Nursing care, as seen by phenomenology, is construed as an organized process that evolves through history. It is holistic, does not fraction the body, it breaks away from causal, simplistic answers considering the context. Phenomenology, during care interaction, allows us to recognize the participants in order to understand and give meaning to reality. Through life experiences, it allows us to explore words, intersubjective relationships, and the dialogue that encourages the building of a comprehensive relationship of healthcare<sup>(17)</sup>. Accordingly, care from the phenomenological approach includes nursing interventions for and with the human being, based on knowledge and skills, which promotes, maintains, and recovers the wholeness of the human being. It compels one to reflect about their life experience and interpret

the practice for the comprehension of the person receiving care. It reiterates that care should be renewed each time, because the human receiving the care is not an emotionless object, but a human being that suffers and needs help to mature and be able to discover the meaning of their life.

The reflection presented here ascertains the holistic view that nursing has to develop when approaching the care of a person. Although nursing in contemporary times has made progress in multiple technical aspects and processes to improve health care, it does not provide the meaning of life we mentioned above for both persons.

At an assistance level, a duality exists consisting of what people demand and what nursing, as a profession, offers. Habits and routines created in the nursing practice are still a considerable step away from the very essence of nursing, which is why the inclusion of phenomenology as a comprehensive and interpretative knowledge base will help to explain the structure or essence of a real-life experience during the search of the interaction of both individuals during nursing care. The purpose of the clinical record sheet is to create evidence of the care proved, where the accurate description of the real-life experience is visualized, and thereby perceived, by both persons.

We agree in thinking that phenomenology is the way to reach the essence of the studied phenomena if, when followed, it returns the patient to their true humanity. It will be the catalyst that leads to providing satisfaction for the work performed and the care received, a task we have to perform in the face of the demands that concern not only phenomenology but also all philosophical endeavors, which would be a major step in understanding the deafening silence that occurs when a person is sick.

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