

EDUCATIONAL COURSES IN NURSING IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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Abstract

The primary problem of the Czechoslovak healthcare system after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was the insufficient qualification of nurses, which was closely related to the small number of nurses relative to the number of patients. Despite the founding of several nursing schools, the number of qualified nurses remained insufficient.

In the interwar period (1918 – 1938) and also during and after the Second World War, ever more categories of nursing personnel worked in hospitals and medical facilities in Slovakia. Because of the lack of professionally qualified nurses, hospitals independently organised educational nursing courses for nursing staff. These nursing courses were organised in the Czechoslovak Republic as early as 1930 in the state hospitals in Bratislava, Košice, Žilina, Mukachevo, in the general hospital in Prague and in the state Šrobárov Children's Institute in Smokovec. Aside from the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education, such nursing courses were also organised by several associations, such as the Czechoslovak Red Cross, the American Red Cross, the Czechoslovak Mother and Child Protection, as well as nursing schools themselves.

The issue of organising courses in order to reduce the shortage of nursing personnel lasted in Czechoslovakia until the end of the 1950s. These nursing courses initially had their justification, as they provided education in a short time mainly to nurses who had already proven themselves in nursing practice. However, the courses were repeatedly assessed critically as providing insufficient education for obtaining a position as a qualified registered nurse, and their content should not have been recognised as equivalent to a nursing school education.

Keywords: *historical research, Czechoslovakia, nursing education, nursing courses, registered nurses*

INTRODUCTION

In the 1930s, only 15% of all hospitals and medical institutes in Czechoslovakia had a fully qualified nursing staff. According to statistics from 1931, out of approximately 7,700 people who worked in hospitals and medical institutions caring for the sick in Czechoslovakia, only about 650 were in fact registered nurses (Andělová 1933).

In this period, several nursing schools which educated future civilian nurses as well as nurses from religious orders were established in the Czechoslovak Republic. A nursing school typically had a capacity of 25 to 60 students, the exception being the nursing school in Prague, where up to 100 students could study. Despite the founding of several nursing schools, the main problem of the Czechoslovak healthcare system was the lack of qualification among nurses, which was closely linked to the small number of nurses in relation to the number of sick people. Another problem was the inadequate organisation of the nursing service and the poor social conditions of the staff. The insufficient qualification of nursing personnel is presented in the data from the yearbook of the State Statistical Office from 1934; the number of hospitals and medical institutions in Czechoslovakia totalled 461; the number of beds was 72,453, and the number of nursing personnel was 8,138, of which only 1,062 were registered nurses, i.e., graduates of nursing schools (Zprávy, 1934).

It should be noted that the figures from 1931 and 1934 derive from different statistical sources and refer to different reference years. Although the overall number of nursing personnel increased between these

years, the data demonstrate that this increase did not result in a proportionate rise in the number of registered nurses with formal education.

Until 1914, there was no uniform education or training for nurses in the territories of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia. Nurses were primarily hired at hospitals as auxiliary staff and became nurses only as a result of their own experience. Only at the instigation of the Austrian authorities did nursing come to the reforms that brought it closer to developed countries. The Ministerial Regulation on the Care of Patients of 25 June 1914 stipulated the establishment of nursing schools, the method of training, and the duties and rights of a registered nurse. It further included a regulation related to the registration of qualified nurses. Registered nurses were also given the freedom to take a pledge to provide care to the sick in wars and epidemics. If a registered nurse took this pledge, she received a badge of honour (*Česká nemocnice* 1941).

From that moment on, however, no change was made in the requirements for nursing education. As is mentioned in the magazine *Československá nemocnice* [Czechoslovak Hospital] from 1938, there were 12 functioning nursing schools in that period, four of which were civil (*the Czech and German schools in Prague, the Czech and Moravian in Ostrava, and Slovak in Turčiansky Sv. Martin*) and eight belonged to religious orders (*the Czech and German schools in Hradec Králové, Brno, Bratislava, Opava, Znojmo and Košice, the Czech schools in Chomutov and the German schools in Ústí nad Labem*). About 2,000 nurses graduated from the existing nursing schools. Even if they were all employed, they would cover only about 25% of the qualified personnel needed in practice (*Česká nemocnice* 1941).

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The subject of the paper is to present the efforts made to increase the number of nurses through training in nursing courses. With regard to categorisation, several types of medical staff worked in medical facilities in the interwar period: registered nurses, nuns from religious orders, practical nurses, and untrained practical nurses. Because there was a lack of professionally qualified nurses, hospitals organised educational nursing courses on their own. These were short-term six-month courses for auxiliary nurses, which could be organised on the basis of a government regulation since 1927. Aside from hospitals, the Czechoslovak Red Cross, the American Red Cross and the Czechoslovak Mother and Child Protection organisation were greatly active in organising such courses for auxiliary nurses. From the viewpoint of developing nursing education in Slovakia, these courses preceded the establishment of religious nursing schools in Bratislava and Košice in Slovakia.

From a methodological perspective, the study is based on historical-analytical research. The analysis draws on primary archival sources, period professional journals, institutional records and legislative documents related to nursing education and healthcare administration in Czechoslovakia.

Primary sources include archival materials from the Slovak National Archive, chronicles of nursing schools, records of religious nursing congregations, ministerial decrees, and articles published in contemporary professional journals such as *Československá nemocnice*. These sources were analysed in relation to relevant secondary literature in the field of nursing history and healthcare education.

The chronological framework of the study covers the period from 1918 to 1950, with particular emphasis on the interwar years. Documents were selected on the basis of their direct relevance to the organisation of nursing courses, the structure of nursing education and contemporary professional debates concerning the adequacy and quality of course-based training.

The analytical approach focused on identifying recurring themes in the sources, especially arguments for and against short-term nursing courses, professional evaluations of their outcomes, and their relationship to institutional nursing schools. Interpretations are grounded in the historical context of the period and reflect contemporary professional discourse rather than retrospective assessment.

The study does not aim to evaluate nursing courses from a contemporary educational perspective, but rather to reconstruct and interpret their role within the historical development of nursing education in Czechoslovakia.

RESULTS

In 1927, a government regulation on the regulation of the salary and service conditions of civilian nurses in state medical and humanitarian institutes and in the General Hospital was issued in the first Czechoslovak Republic. The obligation to complete a two-year institutional nursing course was added to the conditions for the hiring of auxiliary nurses of the so-called 2nd category.

This measure introduced a form of training that was subsequently criticised in contemporary professional discourse as an unsatisfactory substitute for institutional nursing education, particularly by representatives of nursing schools and professional nursing organisations. While qualified nurses who were able to work independently always emerged from nursing schools, the results of these other courses were questionable.

In contemporary professional discourse, nursing was not understood solely as a technically demanding occupation, but also as a vocation requiring “moral quality”, a concept frequently used in nursing literature and educational debates of the interwar period.

Its primary attribute was the moral quality of individuals practicing the profession, and this could only be achieved in regular nursing schools connected to a boarding school, where the students were led by teachers – themselves qualified nurses.

Nursing courses

In the interwar period (1918 – 1939) and likewise during and after the Second World War, several categories of nursing personnel worked in hospitals and medical facilities in Slovakia. These were registered nurses with two or more years of education, nurses from religious orders, practical nurses with less than two years of education, and untrained nurses (Golf H. A., 1934, cf. Falisová A., 2006). Based on a government regulation from 17 March 1927, Section 3, a person could be a nurse if he/she *met the general conditions for performing civil service, was at least 18 years of age, was physically and mentally fit, was trustworthy and had passed the school-leaving examination according to the regulation of the Ministry of the Interior of 25 June 1914, No. 139 of the Code of Civil Procedure and had demonstrated professional competence*. Because of the lack of professionally qualified nurses, hospitals independently organised educational nursing courses for nursing staff. Nursing courses were organised in Czechoslovakia as early as 1930 in state hospitals in Bratislava, Košice, Žilina, Mukachevo, in the General Hospital in Prague and in the state Šrobárov Children’s Institute in Smokovec. These were short, six-month courses for auxiliary nurses, which took place on the basis of Section 57 of Government Regulation No. 22 Coll. of 17 April 1927. With Decree No. 32739 of 5 January 1931, the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education established a second nursing course, but only in hospitals in Bratislava and Košice (*Československá nemocnice 1931*).

In the first half of the 20th century, the organisation of nursing courses in Czechoslovakia was frequently preceded by the founding of nursing schools or was an accompanying phenomenon. As an example, the ground for the founding of the first nursing school of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Bratislava in 1931 (see Ilievová – Juríková – Lichner et al., 2020) also helped lay the ground for the founding of the first nursing school. Even prior to the establishment of the independent Slovak province of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross, the assigning of the superior Sr. Teodózia Hossová to organise nursing courses for nurses was accepted by Sister Mária Fides Dermeková on 19 July 1927. She had received her own professional nursing education by studying at a two-year nursing school in Prague (Ilievová– Juríková – Lichner et al., p. 55 – 59). With Decree No. 32739 of 5 January 1931, the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education organised a second nursing course, but only in hospitals in Bratislava and Košice (Zprávy 1934). A second state nursing course was organised by the State Hospital in Bratislava, which was also led by Sr. Fides Mária Dermeková, who was the future administrative director of the newly established Nursing School of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Bratislava. At that same time, she also worked as the superior of the nursing sisters in the State Hospital. The course, which lasted from 3 February 1931 to 9 June 1931, was completed by 20 members of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross and 40

secular persons (Kronika 1931); it ended with a final state exam, and the chairman of the examination board was JUDr. Richard Bébr, section head of the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education in Prague.

A third state nursing course was opened at the State Hospital in Bratislava simultaneously with the lectures at the newly opened nursing school, and it lasted from 3 November 1931 to 20 March 1932. The congregation received written notification of the acceptance of 30 nurses and candidates who were to attend this state nursing course. The course was led by Sister Mária Fides Dermeková, already the director of the nursing school, who also lectured on nursing techniques for 40 teaching hours as part of the course (Kronika 1931).

During the 1930s, the sisters of the Daughters of Christian Charity of St. Vincent also organised nursing courses at their provincial headquarters in Ladce, where novice nuns prepared for the profession of nurses. At the end of the 1930s, they used lectures by professors and doctors from the former nursing school in Košice, old textbooks, as well as brochures that they printed in their own printing house in Ladce. These were originally used until they opened a nursing school in Trenčín, which only happened after the Second World War.

Aside from the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education, nursing courses were also organised by several societies, such as the Czechoslovak Red Cross (hereinafter the ČSČK), the American Red Cross, and the Czechoslovak Protection of Mothers and Children.

The Slovak Committee of the ČSČK organised nursing courses throughout Slovakia in the 1930s. As an auxiliary component of the military medical service, it received tasks directly from the Ministry of National Defence, in whose services trained nurses worked. Along with its major activities in the fight against epidemics and assistance to the population affected by natural disasters, the ČSČK also devoted itself to caring for children, organising “childcare” courses for mothers, as well as opening nurseries, shelters, counselling centres, hostels and dining halls. It, too, organised nursing courses, focusing on health promotion and health education. In the Chronicle of the Nursing School of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Bratislava, we find a record from 10 January 1936 on the organisation of the Emergency Course of the ČSČK in cooperation with the Association of Graduated Nurses. The course took place in Prague from 24 February to 1 March 1936. Compulsory lectures were held at the General Hospital in Prague II, and exercises with a gas mask and in a gas chamber took place in Prague in Vysočany. The expense contribution was 10 Czechoslovak crowns. The course was mainly intended for registered nurses from Bohemia; from Slovakia it was attended by Sr. Sapientia and Sr. Adrianna from the Nursing School of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Bratislava, and they received a certificate of participation in the course (Kronika 1936).

The ČSČK mainly employed qualified nurses, graduates of the nursing school in Prague, and then graduates of the Higher School of Social Care at the M. R. Štefánik Institute in Turčiansky Sv. Martin as social and health nurses. The integration of newly hired social and health nurses was done such that nurses with an institutional education, predominately social nurses, gained practice at the stations from qualified nurses and vice versa. The ČSČK regularly organised two continuing courses for social and health nurses every year. Along with repeating material from the field of case technique, work with volunteers and topics from general social and health roles, each course covered topics related to mass social phenomena, such as emigration, development of the human organism, nutrition, clothing, housing, family cohesion, general social policy, social legislation and national economic issues. These courses were also combined by practical demonstrations about, for example, dairy foods, baking bread, various diets, etc.

In their early days, the courses lasted three months, with lectures in the range of 10 – 12 hours a week. The ČSČK also organised lectures and film screenings and published leaflets, health-educational literature and the magazine *Správy Červeného kríža* [Red Cross News] (Beniak 1993). The ČSČK also organised courses for nurses who would voluntarily, selflessly, and without payment help with the care of the sick and wounded in the event of war, natural disaster or epidemic under the guidance of doctors and certified nurses (*In Slovakia, the courses were held in Ružomberok, Kremnica, Liptovský sv.*

Mikuláš; in Subcarpathian Ruthenia in Mukachevo and Uzhhorod. Graduates were granted the title of "volunteer nurse of the Czechoslovak Red Cross").

An example of organising nursing courses is the *Course for Training Nurses in Moravská Ostrava*. From 1924, at the request of doctors, the ČSČK for the city of Ostrava extended the organisation of courses to 6 months. Lectures covered 8 hours a week, and compulsory practice in a hospital became part of the course. The practical training lasted three to four months. In 1926, 83 participants attended the course; in 1927 there were 72, with two-thirds of them being nuns who completed the course on the recommendation of hospital directors.

DISCUSSION

Criticism of the nursing courses

Initially, these nursing courses had their justification, since they provided education in a short time mainly to practical nurses and nurses without the qualification of a "registered nurse". Although nursing courses initially fulfilled an important function, they were repeatedly criticised by registered nurses, professional associations, and representatives of nursing schools as an insufficient form of education for qualified nursing practice.

This critical assessment is documented in contemporary professional journals, conference resolutions, and lectures delivered by leading figures in Czechoslovak nursing education.

A lecture entitled "Ošetrovatel'ství" [On Nursing], by graduate nurse Maria Anzenbacherová, which she delivered for the Union of Czechoslovak Officers on 6 November 1935 at Štefánik's House in Prague, was published by the periodical *Československá nemocnice* (1935). In it, Anzenbacherová critically assessed the fact that "...a hairdresser, milliner or seamstress learns their trade for 3 – 4 years and must pass a journeyman's exam, but paradoxically no training is required for nurses, who have a person's health and life in their hands"

An element of the criticism was also the inability of the course organisers to provide the participants with moral education at the level that was provided at nursing schools during two years of a boarding school education (Kleinschnitz 1935). At the second congress of registered nurses, in Prague on 19 – 21 December 1931 (Zprávy 1932), a resolution was adopted, which recommended that nursing courses be organised only for a limited time and that more effort should be made to establish nursing schools in which erudite certified nurses would be educated. At the congress, the organising of courses *on institutional and social health care, administration, laboratory work, roentgen-radium therapeutics, hydro-electrotherapy, obstetrics, venereology, on the treatment and prevention of nervous and mental diseases, and on proper nutrition and dietetics* was recommended (Andělová 1933).

Short-term nursing courses were also criticised at a conference of nursing schools during the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic in Turčiansky Sv. Martin on 30 September 1937. Aside from the issues of publishing uniform textbooks for nursing schools, the status for licensing nursing schools, preliminary education of candidates for nursing schools, and the working and social conditions of professional nurses, the conference also addressed the question of cancelling short-term nursing courses. Associate Professor Ľudovít Valach, director of the nursing school of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Bratislava, spoke indignantly at the conference against the organisation of short-term four-month courses, whose graduates even had hiring priority as nurses in hospitals. In his view, short-term courses lowered the level of nursing education. Dr. Havlík, from Brno, also joined the discussion on the issue of organising short-term courses. He noted that in the regional hospital in Brno only 16 of the 345 nurses there were registered nurses (Kronika 1937). The conference participants agreed that in solving the problem of the insufficient number of registered nurses, more attention should be paid to establishing nursing schools and educating a larger number of registered nurses, as well as to organising continuing courses for nurses. The organiser of these courses should be a professional organisation – the Association of Registered Nurses (The original name of the professional organisation of nurses was the Association of Graduates of Nursing Schools, founded in 1920 on the initiative of 10 registered nurses, the first graduates of the Czech Two-Year Nursing School at the General Hospital in Prague).

Continuing education courses were to be organised in two categories. The first category was to be *general continuing education courses*. Each hospital could organise them for its own staff and they should be mandatory. The second category was to be *specialisation courses*, which were to be held exclusively in nursing schools, and only registered nurses were to be allowed to attend them.

In 1938, according to the reports of the Central Statistical Office, a total of 4,661 women were employed in medical institutions in Bohemia and Moravia, of whom 771 were registered nurses, meaning they still constituted only 16% of the qualified nursing staff (Anzenbacherová 1941).

Nursing courses were also organised during the Second World War. The course organised for radiologists or x-ray specialists became particularly well-known. These courses were approved by decrees of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. The course was implemented, for example, in the State Hospital in Turčiansky Sv. Martin based on the decree No. 92 361-V/15-1941 of 3 November 1941.

Act on Extraordinary Nursing Diplomas

The draft *Act on extraordinary nursing diplomas and further training of nurses* was an attempt to solve the problem of a shortage of qualified nurses after the Second World War. The draft Act was initiated by the Union of Social and Health Service Employees in November 1945. An extraordinary diploma granted to nurses was approved by Act No. 94. Coll. of 16 June 1947. The goal of the act was to assess the selfless service of nurses in hospitals who, *for social reasons could not obtain professional education at nursing schools during the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic but nevertheless devoted themselves to the nursing profession*. The Act recognised the right of nurses to obtain an extraordinary nursing diploma, if as of the date of entry into force of the act they could demonstrate 10 years of continuous service in a hospital as a nurse and had completed a hospital course according to Section 57 of Government Regulation No. 22 of 1927. Further, it also included those who had not completed any nursing course, but who had demonstrated 15 years of service in a hospital on the date the law came into effect. Persons who worked predominately outside a hospital, who had worked at the bedside of the sick for at least one year, as well as persons who had completed an institutional course and whose nursing service had lasted more than 15 years, were also entitled to obtain an extraordinary nursing diploma.

The Act also allowed for one-year additional training at two-year nursing schools. The conditions for completing the one-year education were four years of nursing work in a hospital or other medical facility, at least four classes of a secondary school, and satisfactory physical and mental health. Candidates applied directly to nursing schools. The training was free of charge, since employers needed to supplement the number of nurses during the training period; therefore, 1,400 CZK were deducted from the candidates' salaries. The remainder of the salary, approximately 600 – 800 CZK, stayed with the candidate, but only if she/he committed to working for the employer for another five years after graduating from school. The Act allowed this option until 1950 (Anzenbacherová 1948). The further training of nursing personnel and the granting of special diplomas were among the items on the agenda of the Conference of Nursing Schools held on 25 – 26 November 1946 in Prague (SNA, Health Commission).

Lectures at vocational schools

The nursing profession was also promoted by the Education and Enlightenment Commission in Bratislava with the goal of increasing the number of registered nurses. It recommended to the Health Commission that it should permit a lecture by registered nurse Roušarová, Director of the ČSČK nursing school, to be read in classrooms of health science, physical education, civic education or home economics at vocational schools for women's professions. The lecture was to be read in Slovak with the aim of increasing the recruitment of female students to nursing schools (SNA, Education and Enlightenment Commission 1947). In Slovakia, vocational schools for women's professions were located in the following cities: Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Bratislava, Brezno n/Hronom, Kežmarok, Lučenec, Košice, Liptovský sv. Mikuláš, Michalovce, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Nitra, Nové

Zámky, Prešov, Prievidza, Ružomberok, Spišská Nová Ves, Trenčín, Trnava, Turčiansky sv. Martin, Zvolen, Žilina, the State School of the M. R. Štefánik Institute in Turčiansky sv. Martin, the State School of social-health care in Bratislava. In Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, this lecture was to be read at the suggestion of the Ministry of Health at vocational schools for women's professions as early as 1946, and the directors of vocational schools were to cooperate in providing the lecture (SNA, Education and Enlightenment Commission 1946).

Despite the existence of two-year nursing schools with their gradual transition to three-year and four-year medical schools, the issue of organising courses as a way to influence the lack of nursing staff persisted in the Czechoslovak Republic until the end of the 1950s. In some cases, these were only retraining courses for health workers, e.g., in the treatment of trachoma and in the fight against it (SNA, Health Commission 1950).

At the end of the 1950s, despite the fact that several secondary medical schools were already in existence, courses were also organised by the health departments of the Regional National Committees according to Section 20 of the Decree of the Ministry of Health No. 70/1953 of 3 February 1953. Upon completion of the one-year course, graduates could work as nurses in all preventive and curative care facilities in Czechoslovakia.

The Slovak division of the ČSČK also continued with educational courses (SNA, Health Commission 1948). In the field of Samaritanism and Nursing, they organised a course on caring for the sick in the home and in the countryside. When providing assistance, it was necessary to show proper identification. The course was led by certified nurses of the ČSČK and comprised 6 to 8 hours; the lectures were two hours long. In 1950, the Health Commission planned to organise a retraining course for midwives (SNA, Health Commission 1950).

CONCLUSION

In the interwar period, medical education provided institutional training for doctors, certified nurses and midwives. Nurses without a diploma were trained in courses run primarily by the Czechoslovak Red Cross, the American and British Red Cross, but also by the activities of doctors in state hospitals. One such course in the late 1920s and early 1930s explicitly preceded the founding of the Nursing School of the Sisters of Charity of the Holy Cross in Bratislava, which could already prepare registered nurses for practice. The shortage of professionally educated nurses meant that all applicants who expressed an interest in studying were admitted to the courses. Several hundred women thus completed short-term courses organised by the Czechoslovak Red Cross. These courses included a theoretical part as well as professional hospital practice. This was the most necessary basic training; the rest of the knowledge was acquired literally "on the go" upon starting work. After the Second World War, the shortage of nurses was addressed by organising courses not only by the Czechoslovak Red Cross, but also by the Regional National Committees and by new legislation that permitted auxiliary nurses to take exams and obtain a diploma that entitled them to practice the profession of a registered nurse.

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