


## Discipline of Forensic Nursing in undergraduate Nursing: Experiences, didactic strategies, and reflections in a city in the interior of São Paulo

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### ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the implementation and outcomes of an elective course in Forensic Nursing within a bachelor's degree program in nursing, located at a higher education institution in the interior of São Paulo. With the overarching goal of reflecting upon and sharing accumulated experiences, the research focuses on the application of innovative teaching strategies such as realistic simulation, dialogic lectures, group discussions, case studies, and simulated laboratory activities to engage students and prepare them for the practical and ethical challenges encountered in Forensic Nursing. The qualitative methodology of experience reports enabled the description and analysis of these pedagogical practices and their effectiveness in contributing to the enhancement of education and professional practice in Forensic Nursing, emphasizing the importance of specific training in preparing professionals for forensic demands.

**Keywords:** Forensic Nursing, Pedagogical Practices, Nursing Education, Innovative Teaching Strategies, Higher Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Forensic Nursing has established itself as an essential field at the intersection of the healthcare system and the judiciary, highlighting the growing need for professionals who integrate medical competencies with the meticulous collection and analysis of forensic evidence. This specialty emphasizes the importance of attention and protection for victims of violence, in addition to their active participation as specialized witnesses in judicial proceedings. This specialty emphasizes the importance of care and protection for victims of violence, as well as actively participating as expert witnesses in legal proceedings (American Nurses Association & International Association of Forensic Nurses, 2021).

The historical development of Forensic Nursing shows how the application of nursing science in contexts where health and justice systems overlap has evolved significantly. Historically, documents point to the emergence of specialized nursing practice in the mid-1970s in the United States of America and Canada (Lynch & Duval, 2011). And, from the first records of specialized nursing practice in the 1970s in the United States and Canada to the formalization of the practice with the founding of the International Association of Forensic Nurses in 1991, the field has expanded its boundaries and clearly defined its scope and objectives (Esteves *et al.*, 2014; Valentine *et al.*, 2020). The definition of Forensic Nursing according to the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN), is the application of nursing science in situations where the health and justice systems overlap (International Association of Forensic Nurses, 2021). Other authors define forensic nursing as the specialty that "combines the traditional acumen of nursing with those of forensic science and justice" (Lynch & Duval, 2011, p. 55).

In Brazil, Forensic Nursing was recognized by the Federal Council of Nursing (COFEN) as a specialty in 2011, number 17.2 through Resolution No. 389 (Federal Council of Nursing, 2011). Since then, the role and role of forensic nurses has been debated. However, it was in 2017, through Cofen Resolution No. 556, that the areas of activity of this professional were regulated. The Forensic Nurse, in the Brazilian territory, is defined, according to the Federal Council of Nursing in 2017, as:

..."bachelor's degree in nursing, holder of a lato or stricto sensu specialization title in forensic nursing issued by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) recognized by the MEC, or granted by Societies, Associations or Colleges of Specialists, registered within the scope of the Cofen System/Regional Councils ..." (Federal Council of Nursing, 2017).

The integration of Forensic Nursing into academic curricula reflects a vital response to contemporary needs for justice and health care. The development of nurses who are not only technically competent, but also prepared to face unique challenges in forensic contexts, demands a pedagogical approach that transcends traditional teaching. The integration of Forensic Nursing into academic curricula emerges as a vital element for the development of nurses who are not only



technically competent, but also prepared to face unique challenges in forensic contexts (Barros & Castellana, 2020; Cazañas *et al.*, 2021).

The adoption of innovative didactic strategies in Forensic Nursing education, such as realistic simulations and case studies, represents a significant advance in the training of these professionals. These methodologies not only improve students' understanding of forensic concepts, but also develop critical skills and practical application of knowledge in real-life situations (Joaquim, 2019; Silva *et al.*, 2021a).

Forensic Nursing training should balance the development of practical skills with a strong ethical foundation. It is essential that nurses are prepared to meticulously collect evidence and provide specialized care to victims, always respecting their dignity and rights. The integration of theoretical and practical knowledge, combined with reflection on common ethical dilemmas in forensic practice, is crucial to train qualified professionals who are aware of their fundamental role in the interface between health and justice (Esteves *et al.*, 2014; Fernandes, Furtado & Alves, 2018).

The effectiveness of Forensic Nursing education can be ensured through rigorous evaluation of educational outcomes. Assessing the impact of the pedagogical strategies employed and identifying areas for continuous improvement are essential steps in refining curricula. This process ensures that students are adequately prepared to face the challenges of forensic practice, ensuring high-quality training that meets the complex needs of this field (Nucci, 2020; Rabelo, 2020).

The practice of Forensic Nursing is grounded in firm ethical principles, with an unwavering commitment to the dignity and human rights of victims. Educating nurses to make correct ethical judgments in complex and often emotionally charged situations is a priority. This involves a deep understanding not only of the legal issues, but also of the humanistic aspects involved in caring for victims of crime and violence (Oguisso & Zoboli, 2017).

The implementation and development of Forensic Nursing in Brazil faces significant challenges, including the need for formal recognition of the specialty and the development of specific educational and public health policies and programs. Despite these obstacles, the growing recognition of the importance of Forensic Nursing is a valuable opportunity to strengthen the profession. This recognition is reflected in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations, which details Forensic Nursing under the CBO code 2235-85, evidencing the formalization of the activity within the Brazilian health system (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2023). In addition, the expansion of the role of nurses in the justice system contributes to a more humanized and effective care for victims, as well as to the expansion of the reception of demands related to the violation of rights and violence in society (Silva & Silva, 2009; Souza *et al.*, 2020).

The Brazilian Society of Forensic Nursing (SOBEF), founded in 2017, plays an important role in promoting education, practice, and research in Forensic Nursing. Articulating researchers,



professionals, educational institutions and groups contributes to the improvement of standardized and validated guidelines and protocols that contribute significantly to the qualification of professional training and improvement of practice in this area. This collective effort is essential for the advancement of Forensic Nursing in Brazil, ensuring that forensic nurses are well prepared to meet the demands of the field and contribute to justice and the care of victims with competence and ethics (SOBEF, 2019).

The future prospects for Forensic Nursing are extremely promising, indicating a trajectory of growth and increased recognition within the healthcare and legal communities. Robust educational and research development is essential to enhance professional practice and contribute meaningfully to public health and legislation. The consolidation of this specialty requires a joint effort by academic institutions, health agencies, and the justice system, aiming at an effective and humanized integration in the care of victims and in the management of forensic cases (Furtado *et al.*, 2021; Esteves *et al.*, 2014).

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for the effective integration of Forensic Nursing into health and justice systems. Strategic partnerships between educational institutions, public health agencies, and judicial entities can facilitate more efficient and humanized approaches to the care of crime victims, in addition to improving the collection and analysis of forensic evidence. This type of collaboration promotes a broader and more inclusive view of justice, ensuring that forensic nurses can contribute in a meaningful and ethical way (Silva *et al.*, 2021a; Silva *et al.*, 2021b).

The specialization in Forensic Nursing offers nurses the opportunity to expand their competencies and areas of practice, facing cases that require specialized knowledge about legal and health aspects. This training not only enriches the career of professionals, but also contributes significantly to the justice system and the proper care of victims. The forensic nurse, therefore, emerges as a crucial link in the chain of care, adding inestimable value to the multidisciplinary team (Cazañas *et al.*, 2021; Souza *et al.*, 2020).

The effective practice of Forensic Nursing requires qualified training and continuous education, in view of the relevance of constant professional updating. Given the complexities and challenges emerging from this unique specialty, it is imperative that there are significant investments in training and professional development. Continuing education programs and refresher opportunities ensure that forensic nurses keep their skills sharp and are prepared to perform competently and ethically in an ever-evolving field (Silva *et al.*, 2021a; Silva *et al.*, 2021b).

This chapter highlights the need for specific training and innovative didactic strategies in Forensic Nursing, emphasizing the importance of ethical practices and continuous assessment of learning. As forensic nursing education and practice advances, the joint engagement of educational institutions, practitioners, and regulatory bodies in promoting educational programs and policy



development will be critical. This joint effort will not only prepare nurses to competently and ethically address forensic challenges, but will also contribute significantly to justice and care for victims. Thus, this chapter calls on educators, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to invest in the advancement of Forensic Nursing, ensuring its sustainable development and effective integration into health and justice systems, both in Brazil and globally.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

### GENERAL OBJECTIVE

Reflect and share the experiences accumulated during the planning, organization and execution of the elective discipline of Forensic Nursing in a bachelor's degree course in nursing.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To detail the pedagogical approaches adopted in the provision of Forensic Nursing for nursing students, highlighting the use of realistic simulations, dialogued classes, group discussions, case studies and simulated laboratory activities.
- Evaluate the impact of didactic strategies on student learning, based on the results of theoretical and practical evaluations carried out during the course.
- To argue about the relevance of specialization in Forensic Nursing for the preparation of nursing professionals in the face of forensic demands in various areas of activity.
- To emphasize the importance of educational practices that respect the ethical precepts of research on human beings, especially in educational contexts that involve simulations and case studies in Forensic Nursing.

## METHOD

### TYPE OF STUDY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, characterized as an experience report. This method is particularly suitable for investigating in depth the innovations in pedagogical practices and their impact on the teaching and learning of Forensic Nursing during the bachelor's degree in Nursing. The experience report provides a detailed and rich view of educational processes, highlighting the importance of perceptions obtained from professional practice in teaching and research, especially in teaching (Creswell, 2014).

### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The analysis was conducted by the professor responsible for the elective discipline of Forensic Nursing, with a total duration of 40 hours. It was based on the author's lived experiences,



including the planning of the discipline and the indirect and direct observations made during the second semester of 2023. This approach allowed us to capture a variety of perceptions and experiences related to the implementation and reception of the Forensic Nursing discipline. Data collection involved direct observations, analysis of teaching documents and assessments, as well as student feedback throughout the course. This method offers a comprehensive perspective of the didactic strategies adopted and the students' interaction with the content.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All phases of this study were carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines for research with human beings, and it was classified as an experience report arising from the educational experience without the need for previous systematization of the research. Consequently, it was not necessary to refer the patient for approval by a Research Ethics Committee (REC). Even so, the fundamental ethical principles were strictly observed, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants involved in this experience report, in line with current ethical norms (National Health Council, 2012, 2016, 2022).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results presented portray the experience of offering the discipline entitled "**Forensic Nursing - Elective I**" and offered to undergraduate classes in the 6th and 8th semesters of a bachelor's degree course in nursing at a higher education institution in a small city in the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

The discipline was developed in 8 classes lasting approximately 5 hours each, totaling 40 class hours, in the 2nd semester of 2023, with content detailed in table 1 below.

Table 1 – Detailed Syllabus of Classes: Content, Didactics and Assessment

No.	Classes	Content	Teaching	Class Evaluation
1	Introduction to Forensic Nursing	Overview of Forensic Nursing and its importance	Exhibition classroom as slides	Positive feedback, initial quiz to assess prior knowledge
2	History of Forensic Nursing	History and evolution of Forensic Nursing	Guided discussion and video presentation	Case Study to Contextualize Historical Evolution
3	Forensic Thanatology	Study of death under legal and ethical aspects	Realistic simulation and dialogued lessons	Use of images and videos, feedback via applied exercises
4	Forensic Anthropology	Application of anthropological knowledge in Forensic Nursing	Case Study & Evidence Analysis	Assessment through practical exercises and group discussions



5	Forensic Botany	Use of Plants in Forensic Case Resolution	Hands-on laboratory classes	Feedback from students on laboratory activities, application exercises
6	Forensic Biology	Fundamentals of biology applied to forensics	Dialogued class with the use of anatomical models	Quiz with images and case study to consolidate learning
7	Forensic Toxicology	Toxic substances and their effects on the human body	Toxicological collection and analysis simulation	Hands-on evaluation with analysis protocols, real-time feedback
8	Collection and Preservation of Traces	Methods of Collecting and Preserving Evidence at Crime Scenes	Hands-on demonstration and workshop	Case study with real-world scenario analysis, evaluation by protocol

Source: Author's own, 2024.

These results highlight and detail the sequence of theoretical and practical classes, providing a succinct view of the content covered in each session, the didactic methodologies applied and the evaluations carried out, based on the students' feedback, the use of exercises, case studies, as well as the use of images and videos (chart 1).

To ensure a thorough and structured understanding of the essential concepts in Forensic Nursing, the curriculum structure has been meticulously designed to cover both theoretical and practical aspects. This intentional approach aimed to establish a solid knowledge base, gradually advancing to more specialized and complex topics, crucial for the development of highly trained professionals ready to overcome the specific challenges encountered in the forensic field.

After immersion in the theoretical and practical subjects, the student assessment process was carefully designed to test the acquisition of knowledge and stimulate practical application and critical reflection on the content studied. Chart 2 details the planned evaluations, including case studies, preparatory review tests for conceptual evaluation, and protocols for nursing consultations in forensic situations.

The diversity in the forms of assessment reflects the commitment to a teaching that not only verifies the absorption of content, but also prepares students for the reflective and grounded practice that is essential in the field of Forensic Nursing. This evaluative approach was adopted, considering it to be crucial for the development of capable, reflective professionals prepared to face the challenges of the area with competence and ethics.



Table 2 - Detailed Assessments: Types, Specifications and Practical Applications

No.	Type of Assessment	Areas	Specification	Class-Related
1	Case Studies	---	Critical analysis of real cases	All focus on practical application
2	Proofreading	---	4 alternative questions and 4 multiple-choice questions, diversified	Lectures
3	Protocol for Nursing Consultation in Forensic Situations	Elderly Health, Mental Health, Child Health, Women's Health	6 units, each developing a specific consultation protocol	Practical Classes

Source: Author's own, 2024.

The elective discipline of Forensic Nursing was successfully concluded, evidenced by the expressive final average of 8.5 achieved by all participating students. This result reflects the high engagement of the students and the effectiveness in the assimilation of the proposed content. The implementation of this discipline represents a significant advance in the training of future nurses, providing them with essential knowledge to excel in an area that is constantly expanding and in increasing demand for qualified professionals.

The positive results of the course were complemented by the favorable perception of the students, with 95% of them evaluating the active learning methodologies as effective and enriching. The relevance of the discipline was reinforced by Barros and Castellana (2020), who highlight the need for up-to-date and comprehensive training to face the challenges of Forensic Nursing. This didactic experience not only enhanced teaching and professional practice, but also prepared students to be competent forensic nurses who were well suited to the demands of the field.

The didactic strategies employed during the course were crucial to make learning engaging and effective. Methods such as realistic simulations, group discussions, and practical case analysis provided students with a deep immersion in the reality of Forensic Nursing. These innovative approaches were instrumental in preparing students, offering a robust combination of theory and practice essential for the competent practice of the profession.

The positive response of the students to the methodologies employed — such as realistic simulation and group discussions — evidenced the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting rich and engaged learning, which is essential for a deep understanding of the fundamental principles of Forensic Nursing (Kent-Wilkinson, 2009). The integration between theory and practice, reflected in the results of the assessments, has proven to be a crucial pillar in the teaching of complex specialties, as evidenced by the high level of critical analysis and understanding achieved by students (Barros & Castellana, 2020; Nucci, 2020).





The positive feedback from the students and the results of the evaluations reinforce the importance of innovative didactic strategies and the need for specific and comprehensive training in Forensic Nursing. Such strategies not only enhance the learning experience, but also prepare students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, developing critical thinking and decision-making skills essential for effective performance in real forensic environments (Joaquim, 2019; Martinis & Oliveira, 2015).

Scholars and researchers in the field of education emphasize the value of realistic simulations and group discussions, not only for the assimilation of content, but also for the development of critical professional skills (Joaquim, 2019; Santos & Paschoal, 2017). Thus, the use of such resources of the forensic nursing discipline offered can be considered valuable and of great contribution to the achievement of the proposed objectives.

This study underlined the need for specific training in Forensic Nursing, preparing professionals to meet the complex demands in the various areas of activity, but also the relevance of disciplines that address this theme in professional training. This is in line with legal precepts and proposals in progress in the country and around the world (Federal Council of Nursing, 2017, 2022; WHO recommendations and the 2030 agenda).

The importance of adopting educational strategies that respect ethical principles is emphasized, especially in contexts that do not require evaluation by a Research Ethics Committee, emphasizing the confidentiality and integrity of those involved. The limitations identified in this study are centered on the impossibility of comparisons in the Brazilian context, given the scarcity of published studies and experiences developed in Brazil. Such limitations will certainly be overcome by the development of new studies and future research that include the perspectives of students and other stakeholders, exploring the long-term impact of didactic, practical, professional and quality strategies on forensic care.

As emphasized, studies that demonstrate the evolution of the specialty in the country and the relevance of new initiatives in favor of the consolidation and expansion of Brazilian forensic nursing (Fernandes, Furtado, & Alves, 2018; Furtado *et al.*, 2021).

The inclusion of the discipline of Forensic Nursing in the undergraduate nursing curriculum highlights the effectiveness of teaching methods that cultivate not only the transmission of knowledge but also the development of practical and analytical skills. This case study reveals how innovative pedagogical strategies enhance specialized learning, contributing to the educational literature and offering important insights for educators and policymakers.

This is once again in line with expectations and recommendations aimed at the development of this area in health care and the guarantee of fundamental human rights in line with health and



justice policies (Kent-Wilkinson, 2011; Fernandes, Furtado & Alves, 2018; Brazilian Society of Forensic Nursing, 2019).

In summary, the introduction of the discipline of Forensic Nursing in the curriculum of bachelor's degrees in nursing proved to be a valuable pedagogical initiative. The results achieved reiterate the importance of continuing to explore the development of teaching methods that not only promote the acquisition of knowledge, but also the development of practical and analytical skills crucial for forensic practice in nursing.

## CONCLUSION

This experience report highlights the significant impact of the introduction of the discipline of Forensic Nursing in the baccalaureate nursing curriculum. Through a careful analysis of the innovative pedagogical strategies employed, it became evident that these not only engaged the students, but also provided deep and practical learning. The strong adherence of students to the simulations and practical activities reflects the success of these methodologies, as demonstrated by the excellent performance in the assessments.

The results obtained underline the effectiveness of a curriculum that balances theory and practice, preparing students to face both the practical and ethical challenges of Forensic Nursing. The positive feedback from the students emphasizes the importance of group dynamics and simulations, which not only facilitated the understanding of the concepts, but also fostered the development of essential critical skills.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of this discipline underscores its potential to significantly enrich nursing education, preparing professionals not only to respond to the demands of the present, but also to actively contribute to the evolution of the field. This study serves as a valuable model for other institutions aspiring to innovate and enhance their curricula, especially in subspecialties of nursing, reinforcing the need for adaptable, evidence-based teaching methods that respond to contemporary industry demands.



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