

## EDITORIAL

## Nursing professionalism: a key to sustainable and quality health care

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Healthcare systems around the world are facing a profound crisis, the core of which is a shortage of nurses. According to the World Health Organization, there was a shortage of 5.8 million nurses in 2023 (World Health Organization, 2025, p. 27). This situation threatens not only the quality, efficiency, and safety of healthcare care, but also the very functioning of these systems. The global shortage of nurses is also related to current demographic and health trends, including an ageing population, an increase in chronic diseases, and a consequent growing need for healthcare. In this situation, nurses continue to maintain their irreplaceable place in the provision of healthcare, with their professionalism and dedication being invaluable and characteristic of their profession (Yamamoto et al., 2024). Professionalism, which encompasses a number of different attributes that identify and define the nursing profession, is the foundation for achieving key goals in diverse clinical healthcare settings. The level of professionalism can vary significantly depending on the cultural context and the work environment in different countries (Cao et al., 2023; Johnson, 2015).

However, I am convinced that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, nursing in most countries is based on providing competent, safe, and ethically adequate care that is comprehensive and includes disease prevention, health promotion, and therapeutic care in all types of healthcare facilities. This care is also based on trust, respect, and preservation of the dignity of patients. The proven professionalism of nurses significantly influences the satisfaction of healthcare recipients, positive health outcomes, effective collaboration among members of healthcare teams, and contributes to the personal and professional growth of nurses. Our research team carried out a project focused on professionalism from the perspective of nurses. I would like to share with you some of the research results and my thoughts, as I believe that many of them go beyond the scope of Slovakia.

In general, nursing is considered a highly respected profession, and nurses are the backbone

of the healthcare system, providing invaluable support to patients and their families (World Health Organization, 2019). However, in our research, nurses reflected on the rather low social status of the profession in society and the underappreciation of its importance and potential in providing care (Kurucová et al., 2025). The COVID-19 pandemic has not improved this situation in general. The persistence of the biomedical model of care, traditions, and stereotypes does not provide nurses, despite their education, the opportunity to make fundamental changes. This situation is frustrating for them and hinders their professional development. Financial remuneration for nurses corresponds to their low status, weakens their interest in work, and increases the number of nurses leaving the profession (Kramer et al., 2006; Papathanassoglou et al., 2012).

Another topic discussed was the role of nurse managers in promoting professionalism. The rapidly evolving field of nursing requires managers whose job is not easy in these times of rapid change in healthcare value systems and the development of advanced technologies. These changes create various challenges for managers, who are expected to intervene in a timely manner (Ageiz et al., 2021). Nurses expect managers to create suitable working conditions and opportunities for open communication, strengthen relationships, solve problems together, evaluate work, and create a positive working environment. Appropriate working conditions are also linked to the fulfilment of professional standards (Devik et al., 2020). Poor leadership, lack of managerial support, and an unbearable work environment lead nurses to consider leaving (Barkhordari-Sharifabad & Mirjalili, 2019). Nurses consider the relational dimension of work to be a key factor in shaping the workplace, the quality of care provided, and the professional development of individual members (Lotfi et al., 2018).

In such an environment, according to them, the team can positively shape the nurse, strengthening her competencies and motivation. However,

shortcomings in cooperation can have a negative impact not only on workers themselves but also on patients, whose health and satisfaction are directly affected by the quality of team interaction (Rosen et al., 2018). Nurses in our research said that one of the weakest links in the dynamics of relationships is often cooperation between nurses and doctors. In many cases, these relationships cannot be characterised as equal and collaborative. Doctors often do not perceive the nursing profession as autonomous, but rather as a necessary workforce with which they must cooperate. The situation is particularly problematic in the home care setting, where it is limiting and demeaning for nurses with many years of experience to have to be instructed by a doctor about on how to provide nursing care. Paradoxically, in practice, nurses often perform activities beyond their competence, thus substituting for the tasks of a doctor (Žiaková et al., 2024).

The nurses play a key role in the healthcare system, their professional status and social recognition often do not match their actual contribution. At a time when healthcare systems are faced with unprecedented challenges, it is essential to focus not only on increasing the number of nursing staff, but also on improving their working conditions, status, and opportunities for professionalism. Investing in education, promoting autonomy, managerial competence, and improving interdisciplinary cooperation is key to the sustainability and quality of healthcare. At the same time, it is necessary to work systematically to change the perception of nursing by society, strengthen public confidence in nurses, and create a culture of respect and recognition for their work. I believe that open discussion, research, and sharing of experiences can contribute to positive changes not only in Slovakia but also in a broader international context. The professionalism of nurses is not just a professional requirement – it is a fundamental pillar of safe, high-quality, ethical and dignified healthcare.

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