







Perceptions of entrepreneurship among enterostomal therapy nurses

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess how enterostomal therapy nurses perceive entrepreneurship within the specialty. **Method:** A qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory study conducted through semi-structured interviews between January and April 2020, involving 26 entrepreneurial enterostomal therapy nurses recruited using the “Snowball” sampling technique. The collected data were transcribed and subjected to thematic content analysis. **Results:** The findings revealed a range of perceptions from nurses regarding entrepreneurship in enterostomal therapy, leading to the discussion of the following themes: entrepreneurship in nursing and enterostomal therapy; the enterostomal therapist’s view of the entrepreneurial process; and the traits of the entrepreneurial enterostomal therapist. Enterostomal therapy nurses perceive nursing-related entrepreneurship as a proactive, innovative approach, with a growth-oriented perspective within the specialty. They perceive entrepreneurial practice as essential for creating new professional opportunities. **Conclusion:** Entrepreneurship is viewed as an appealing means to enhance autonomy and improve professional performance. It emphasizes the crucial role of developing entrepreneurial skills to excel in various professional environments.


DESCRIPTORS: Nursing. Enterostomal therapy. Entrepreneurship.

Percepções dos enfermeiros estomaterapeutas sobre o empreendedorismo na especialidade

RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar as percepções dos enfermeiros estomaterapeutas sobre o empreendedorismo na especialidade. **Método:** Estudo qualitativo, descritivo e exploratório com coleta de dados realizada por meio de entrevista semiestruturada, entre janeiro e abril de 2020, com 26 estomaterapeutas empreendedores, captados pela técnica “Snowball”. Os dados coletados foram transcritos e tratados aplicando-se a técnica de análise temática de conteúdo. **Resultados:** Os resultados demonstraram as várias percepções dos enfermeiros sobre o empreendedorismo na estomaterapia, resultando na abordagem dos seguintes temas: o empreendedorismo na enfermagem e na estomaterapia; a visão do estomaterapeuta sobre o processo empreendedor; e as características do estomaterapeuta empreendedor. Os enfermeiros estomaterapeutas percebem o empreendedorismo na enfermagem como ação proativa e inovadora, com perspectiva de crescimento do empreendedorismo na especialidade e depreendem a prática empreendedora como uma necessidade de novas oportunidades

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profissionais. **Conclusão:** Concluiu-se que o empreendedorismo é percebido como uma abordagem e uma atuação atrativa para ampliar autonomia e melhorar a prática profissional, enfatizando a importância do desenvolvimento de habilidades empreendedoras para o sucesso nos mais diversos ambientes de trabalho.

DESCRIPTORES: Enfermagem. Estomaterapia. Empreendedorismo.

Percepciones de los enfermeros estomaterapeutas sobre el emprendimiento en la especialidad

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar las percepciones de los enfermeros estomaterapeutas sobre el emprendimiento en la especialidad. **Método:** Estudio cualitativo, descriptivo y exploratorio, con recolección de datos realizada a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas entre enero y abril de 2020, con 26 estomaterapeutas emprendedores, seleccionados mediante la técnica “snowball”. Los datos recolectados fueron transcritos y procesados, aplicando la técnica de análisis temático de contenido. **Resultados:** Los resultados demostraron las diversas percepciones de los enfermeros sobre el emprendimiento en la estomaterapia, resultando en el abordaje de los siguientes temas: el emprendimiento en enfermería y en estomaterapia; la visión del estomaterapeuta sobre el proceso emprendedor; y las características del estomaterapeuta emprendedor. Los enfermeros estomaterapeutas perciben el emprendimiento en enfermería como una acción proactiva e innovadora, con una perspectiva de crecimiento en la especialidad y perciben la práctica emprendedora como una necesidad ante nuevas oportunidades profesionales. **Conclusión:** Se concluyó que el emprendimiento es percibido como un enfoque y una acción atractiva para aumentar la autonomía y mejorar la práctica profesional, enfatizando la importancia de desarrollar habilidades emprendedoras para el éxito en los más diversos ambientes laborales.

DESCRIPTORES: Enfermería. Estomaterapia. Emprendimiento.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has become increasingly prominent across various healthcare fields, including nursing, where autonomy and innovation are essential to meeting the evolving demands of modern healthcare^{1,2}.

Historically, the term “entrepreneurship” emerged around the 15th century from the French words *entrepreneur* and *entreprendre* (to undertake), which refer to organizing, managing, and taking risks in a business or venture. It is, therefore, a process where an individual seizes an opportunity and acts on it to create value^{1,2}.

Entrepreneurship is a multifaceted concept with no single, universally accepted definition, reflecting its polysemous and multidisciplinary nature. Traditionally, entrepreneurship was predominantly associated with the business world, where entrepreneurs were seen as individuals who establish companies with the primary goal of generating profit and achieving prosperity³.

However, research on the subject has evolved, offering broader perspectives that challenge and reshape this traditional view. Entrepreneurship is now recognized not only as a means of generating profit and wealth but also as a catalyst for transformation within organizational and social contexts. These transformations involve the development of new technologies and management practices, as well as the creation of innovative social and educational initiatives⁴.

Some scholars aim to define and identify the key traits of an entrepreneur, often describing them as individuals with the vision and determination to turn dreams into reality. Entrepreneurs are seen as those who can create and manage ventures by blending original and existing ideas, driving innovation, and fostering change within organizations or society^{5,6}.

An entrepreneur demonstrates strong initiative, effective communication skills, and a problem-solving mindset, combined with the ability to recognize and capitalize on opportunities⁷.

Based on these definitions, nurses can indeed be recognized as entrepreneurial professionals, as their inherent skills in creativity, communication, and strategic thinking are deeply embedded in their everyday tasks. These abilities enable them to recognize needs and assume entrepreneurial roles within their work environment, organizational structures, and even in their own entrepreneurial ventures⁸.

From this perspective, nurses can explore a wide range of self-employed opportunities. For example, they could own a business providing direct patient care, offer consulting services, or develop innovative technologies to enhance healthcare processes⁷.

As a result, this professional has been shaping unique and innovative career paths, driven by the rise of nursing specialties that are crucial for adapting to advancements in healthcare technologies and the increasing complexity of contemporary care⁹.

The Federal Nursing Council (Portuguese Acronym: Cofen) has released documents that expand entrepreneurial opportunities for nursing professionals. The latest resolution on this topic, Resolution No. 0568/2018, outlines the guidelines for operating nursing clinics and offices. This regulation paves the way for enhancing nurses' autonomy in providing services across various settings, including individual care, group care, and home-based care¹⁰.

The field of entrepreneurship within the nursing profession is expansive, with enterostomal therapy emerging as a promising specialty for those interested in pursuing entrepreneurial ventures. This specialized area of nursing focuses on caring for individuals facing challenges such as stomas, fistulas, tubes, drains, acute and chronic wounds, and issues related to urinary and fecal incontinence¹¹.

Enterostomal therapists have the opportunity to establish ventures across a variety of institutions, both public and private. They can engage in direct patient care or explore other areas within the field, offering a diverse range of career options. Thus, the specialty opens doors for nurses to explore unconventional sectors, such as the industrial field, while also providing opportunities to establish independent practices in clinics and home care settings¹². Additionally, areas such as specialized auditing and technical consulting for companies that develop enterostomal therapy materials have seen significant growth¹¹.

In this context, the significance of this study lies in its potential to deepen discussions and reflections on the subject, thereby promoting an entrepreneurial culture within both general nursing and specifically within enterostomal therapy.

OBJECTIVES

To assess how enterostomal therapy nurses perceive entrepreneurship within the specialty.

METHODS

This qualitative study is both descriptive and exploratory, conducted in alignment with the guidelines of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ)¹³. The study was carried out at a public university in the Southeast region of Brazil, which offers a graduate program in Nursing with a specialization in Enterostomal Therapy.

Participants were selected using the non-probabilistic "Snowball" sampling technique. In this method, initial participants recruit additional individuals, with the process continuing until saturation is achieved—meaning that interviews no longer provide new or valuable insights¹⁴.

Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: enterostomal therapists, of both genders and all ages, who were currently or had previously engaged in entrepreneurial activities within enterostomal therapy, including areas such as patient care, consulting and/or advisory services, teaching, management, development of social and/or private projects, creation of products and/or technologies, and other forms of entrepreneurial work.

The exclusion criteria included enterostomal therapists involved in entrepreneurial activities outside the nursing field, as well as those who had participated in ventures without contributing to their conceptualization and execution.

Initially, purposive sampling was used, leveraging the primary researcher's close relationship with four entrepreneurial enterostomal therapists from the program—three graduates and one professor. These initial participants were then asked to recommend at least one other entrepreneurial enterostomal therapist.

Based on these participants' recommendations, other entrepreneurial enterostomal therapists were identified and invited to join the study. As a result, the research progressed through these referrals, ultimately involving 26 entrepreneurial enterostomal therapists from four of Brazil's five regions, with the exception of the North, as no specialists from that region were recommended.

Data collection was conducted by the lead author through semi-structured interviews between January and April 2020. The interview script was divided into two sections: the first aimed to collect identification data to create a brief profile of the participants, while the second consisted of two open-ended questions related to the subject of the study.

Four interviews were conducted in person at agreed-upon locations and times, while the remaining (22) were held via videoconference using available platforms due to the geographic distance of some participants and the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020.

The interviews lasted approximately 22 minutes on average and were recorded using a digital voice recorder, allowing for complete access to the participants' responses. The collected data were transcribed and subsequently analyzed using the thematic content analysis approach¹⁵.

The data analysis process consisted of three key stages:

- i) Pre-analysis;
- ii) Analysis of the material;
- iii) Processing of results, inference, and interpretation.

In the pre-analysis stage, an initial reading of the documents was conducted, followed by the selection of relevant materials and the definition of objectives and hypotheses. Next, the data was organized into thematic categories. Finally, in the last stage, the significant results were processed and analyzed based on the study's objectives and theoretical framework¹⁵. Therefore, through this analysis, 279 Recording Units were identified, leading to the following category: perceptions of enterostomal therapists regarding entrepreneurship in enterostomal therapy.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Portuguese Acronym: CEP) of the *Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* under Opinion No. 3.783.965 and under CAAE No. 26540519.2.0000.5282, on December 19, 2019, in compliance with ethical standards. Before each interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form, which they signed after receiving a thorough explanation of the study.

To maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees' identities, a coding system was created using the letter "E" (from the Portuguese word "*entrevista*"), followed by a sequence of cardinal numbers indicating the order of each interview. Numbering began at "one" and followed the order in which the interviews were conducted.

RESULTS

The results revealed various perceptions of entrepreneurship in enterostomal therapy among nurses, highlighting the following themes: entrepreneurship in nursing and enterostomal therapy; the enterostomal therapist's perspective on the entrepreneurial process; and the characteristics of an entrepreneurial enterostomal therapist.

Regarding their perceptions of the entrepreneurship process in nursing and enterostomal therapy, participants were first asked to define entrepreneurship based on their personal experiences and understanding. As a result, many emphasized that entrepreneurship extends beyond the individual or the business itself; it is a broader concept that spans various fields and offers numerous opportunities for engagement. Here are some quotes that reflect these perspectives on the entrepreneurship process:

Entrepreneurship is not solely about creating something new; it can also involve improving work processes, addressing practical challenges, or managing bureaucratic obstacles, and all of that still counts as part of the entrepreneurial process. (E3)

I don't see entrepreneurship as something exclusive to me. I see it as something meant to benefit everyone — professionals, patients, and society as a whole. (E19)

After all, entrepreneurship isn't just about starting a business. The moment you manage to make a change or bring something new to the patient, you've already embraced entrepreneurship. (E23)

The participants also shared their views on the characteristics of an entrepreneur, as reflected in the following statements:

The entrepreneur is someone who nurtures an idea, who doesn't give in to procrastination and fights for it [...] The entrepreneur is someone who has an idea and is able to take it further, turning it into something that can be executed. (E3)

The entrepreneur sees opportunities and business potential where others don't. So, they spot these opportunities and have the courage to take the risk. (E22)

In addition to providing their definitions, the participants also emphasized the perceived growth of entrepreneurship within both enterostomal therapy and general nursing, as illustrated by the following statements:

So, I believe that entrepreneurship in nursing is indeed progressing; little by little, it is growing. (E10)

I see it as something growing, especially in fields of specialization with greater autonomy [...]. When you look at specializations with more autonomy like enterostomal therapy and obstetric nursing, entrepreneurship has grown a lot. (E18)

This perception of entrepreneurial growth was also felt over the years by professionals with more experience. They compared the past with the present, as illustrated by the following statements:

It's easier today. In my time, entrepreneurship was practically nonexistent. I can say it was very difficult for us to get started, but now we are growing in this field. (E19)

I see there's an upward curve now, much more so than when I was in training. (E25)

Another perspective shared by the participants on entrepreneurship is the belief that nurses, and especially enterostomal therapists, can venture into entrepreneurship in many ways, as they possess the potential for it.

So today, this aspect of nursing—this entire progress—demonstrates that nursing professionals can create, innovate, and provide services, regardless of their career path [...] We have this potential to patent or modify products because we are the ones implementing them and using them with our patients. (E03)

Regarding the enterostomal therapist's perspective on the entrepreneurial process, participants highlighted the key elements needed to start this journey, particularly emphasizing the importance of planning and goal setting.

Ultimately, you can create a solid plan, such as setting a goal to open a practice in two years. But what steps should you take in your current role? Maybe earn a bit more, explore different opportunities, and put in the effort to gradually reach that final goal. Planning, managing your ideas, and setting clear objectives are crucial. (E10)

Entrepreneurship demands a well-structured plan. It requires investment and careful organization to ensure success and positive outcomes. (E24)

Regarding the qualities required for an enterostomal therapist, the interviewees highlighted several as essential, especially determination, focus, courage, and self-belief.

You must have focus and determination to carry out the venture envisioned. (E02)

In terms of entrepreneurship, what are you going to do? Set up a practice? Create a course? So, in the end, it all depends on what you want to focus on. (E13)

So, to embark on an entrepreneurship journey, you must start with yourself, not with others. It starts with you, believing in your own potential. (E24)

Another key characteristic highlighted by the enterostomal therapists was the importance of viewing the entrepreneur as someone who consistently works to improve their skills, not only in their technical field but also in the broader aspects of entrepreneurship, as illustrated by the following statements:

I believe that the enterostomal nurse, like any other professional, must focus on entrepreneurship, study, and seek knowledge, thus exploring other areas that can aid in their development. Therefore, a nurse can work in management, business, or marketing. (E1)

In terms of entrepreneurship, people must actually take more courses and gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be an entrepreneur. (E11)

The participants also emphasized that being alert to opportunities for starting projects is a key aspect of entrepreneurship; in other words, it's essential to have good timing.

From the state of Pará to this region, the Midwest, more specifically Goiânia, there were no enterostomal therapists, so I saw a great opportunity there. (E4)

When I set up my clinic, our goal was to address a need in the city — there was a demand for home care, specifically for dressing changes at home, you know? So, once we identified that gap, we decided to create a business to fill that need. (E7)

Today, we already have four companies, and whether by coincidence or not, all four are run by these students who work in homecare. I always tell them the same thing: “Guys, this is no man’s land, and in no man’s land, the first one there takes it”. (E25)

DISCUSSION

The definitions provided by the participants align with various studies that define entrepreneurship as an action aimed at achieving success through the coordination and execution of projects, services, and businesses that create or improve something with added value, ultimately generating wealth and benefiting both individuals and society^{2,5,7}. In line with the participants’ statements, entrepreneurship can be defined as the creation or improvement of something aimed at benefiting both individuals and society¹¹.

Entrepreneurship in nursing involves a wide range of proactive commercial and social actions that aim to positively impact society. This is achieved through innovation and the ability to create and recreate products and processes. The results of these actions are closely linked to areas such as education, health promotion, and the prevention and treatment of health issues. It is also emphasized that entrepreneurship expands opportunities in the job market^{16,17}.

The concept of entrepreneurship is deeply connected to nursing practice, as it encompasses change, the exploration of opportunities, and the development or creation of new ideas. In this context, it's clear that being a nurse means taking proactive steps to drive continuous innovation and change in order to deliver high-quality care¹.

Entrepreneurship within nursing offers a vast field with significant potential to develop both the role and identity of the profession. Thus, it can be seen as a viable and appealing approach to restore professional autonomy, enhance practice, and contribute to the transformation of the healthcare system as a whole¹⁸.

The term “entrepreneur” also encompasses various definitions that resonate with the ideas shared by the interviewees. It is defined as someone with the ability to imagine, develop, and bring visions to life — to dream and work towards turning those dreams into reality. Such an individual is creative and proactive, consistently focused on developing new products and innovations^{19,20}.

The various definitions gathered depict the entrepreneur as a leader, motivated by a strong drive to create new ventures and transform existing ideas through innovation. Moreover, they aim to attract others to collaborate on the proposed venture, working to solve and overcome current challenges. In doing so, they position themselves as key drivers of economic growth and social change within a country^{11,21}.

Based on these definitions and in line with the perceptions of the interviewees, it can be asserted that nurses can be regarded as entrepreneurs par excellence, due to their creative, communicative, and strategic potential. This potential is closely linked to their daily work, where they can identify a need and take on an entrepreneurial role within their work process, in organizational settings, or even in their own business⁸.

The participants highlighted the growing entrepreneurial activities within the specialty, along with the belief that enterostomal therapists possess a high potential for entrepreneurship. Authors support this view of growth in entrepreneurship within enterostomal therapy and nursing, confirming a significant expansion in recent decades. A clear trend toward a more widespread entrepreneurial approach in nursing has emerged, resulting in increased visibility, empowerment, recognition, and financial satisfaction within the profession^{11,22,23}.

Conversely, the study asserts that despite this expansion, the number of businesses opened by nurses remains low. Furthermore, most of these entrepreneurial professionals are still service providers or owners of small businesses with low investments⁵.

It is important to emphasize that, despite the participants' perceptions and the publications highlighting the recent growth of entrepreneurship in the nursing sector, entrepreneurship has been a part of the profession since the early days of modern nursing in the 19th century. Florence Nightingale founded the School of Nursing at St. Thomas' Hospital; Anna Nery innovatively ventured into caring for the wounded during the Paraguayan War; and Wanda de Aguiar Horta is recognized as the first Brazilian nursing theorist. All of these are examples of entrepreneurial nurses^{1,19}.

It is also worth noting that, over 100 years ago, the private practice of nurses was widely considered the norm. In other words, entrepreneurship in nursing has existed since that time. Nurses in the early 20th century were primarily self-employed (about 80%) and were paid directly by private patients in need of nursing care during illness^{5,19}.

Many nursing professionals seek to expand their professional autonomy through entrepreneurship²⁴. Nurses can explore entrepreneurial opportunities in various aspects of their practice, such as providing care, conducting scientific research, working in education, offering care and consulting services, or even venturing into commerce¹¹.

Entrepreneurship is, therefore, an essential aspect of the nursing profession and, consequently, of enterostomal therapy, a specialty in which professionals have flexibility in the job market¹¹. Thus, it is both timely and relevant for enterostomal therapists to recognize the entrepreneurial potential inherent in their specialty.

The participants' perspective on the entrepreneurial process aligns with existing literature, emphasizing that planning and goal setting are crucial factors for the success of any venture. Planning and organization are vital skills for entrepreneurs, demonstrating their ability to strategize, organize, and prioritize tasks in a way that ensures the continuity of work

processes and improves overall performance¹⁷. Inadequate planning and poor preparation during the implementation phase are critical factors that contribute to an entrepreneur's failure²⁰.

In terms of the characteristics required of an enterostomal therapist, the participants' responses align with existing studies on the subject. Perseverance, proactivity, communication, leadership, decision-making, commitment, willpower, competence, self-confidence, creativity, goal setting, and determination are the key traits of entrepreneurial professionals^{7,24,25}.

A study found that Brazilian nurses define themselves as entrepreneurs because they can take on responsibilities and risks, in addition to possessing the talent, competence, and leadership to implement new management processes¹⁹.

To develop these traits, it is crucial to invest in education and training to strengthen entrepreneurial potential. Continuously pursuing further qualifications is a crucial trait for nurses, regardless of the area they choose to specialize in. Likewise, the enterostomal therapist must prioritize delivering high-quality care by integrating up-to-date knowledge grounded in scientific evidence¹¹.

This pursuit of continuous education and training should also be directed towards entrepreneurship, especially as it involves content and actions that are often underrepresented in undergraduate courses. In this regard, enterostomal therapists must consistently focus on their professional development to ensure their success and the success of their venture. Thus, it is essential to systematically develop their cognitive, affective, and motor dimensions to boost creative capacity and improve the chances of success in their professional endeavors⁸.

Many authors highlight the importance of financial management knowledge for entrepreneurial nurses—a skill that participants also consider essential for professionals looking to start their own business, including in the context of intra-preneurship. Therefore, strong administrative skills are fundamental to the success of any venture^{20,21}.

The ability to recognize new opportunities reflects an understanding of the right conditions for achieving profitability, whether through launching new ventures or improving existing ones. This ability is one of the most defining traits of successful entrepreneurs²⁴.

Some authors argue that nurses aiming to enter the entrepreneurial field must cultivate a sharp sense of opportunity and the ability to recognize possibilities that others have missed. This empowers them to explore and capitalize on unique situations, fostering innovative activities and paving the way for new initiatives. Moreover, it is crucial to consider societal needs and actively contribute to enhancing the quality of life^{5,6}.

The sense of opportunity is the defining characteristic of an entrepreneurial nurse. Identifying these opportunities not only paves the way for new ventures but also enhances professional practices, leading to positive impacts across various areas of nursing¹.

The process of recognizing opportunities does not follow a “one-size-fits-all” approach, nor does it require specific techniques or checklists. It ultimately depends on the entrepreneur's own perception and mindset²⁰. This perspective often acts as the driving force behind entrepreneurship, marking the crucial first step in the entrepreneurial journey^{8,24}.

The limitations and challenges encountered during this research included the absence of enterostomal therapists from the Northern region of Brazil among the participants, as well as a lack of specific data and previous studies on entrepreneurship in enterostomal therapy. This hindered the development of the theoretical framework, demanding greater efforts to gather relevant literature.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that enterostomal therapy nurses view entrepreneurship in nursing as a proactive approach that encompasses innovation, project and service coordination, and the creation or enhancement of value-added solutions. There is also a growing awareness of entrepreneurship within the specialty. This involves recognizing the importance of identifying new opportunities. Such opportunities not only pave the way for new ventures but also enhance professional practice and positively impact societal quality of life.

Thus, it can be inferred that entrepreneurship expands the scope of nurses' professional roles. It also enhances the quality of their practice, increasing their autonomy. Ultimately, it plays a crucial role in driving positive changes within the healthcare system.

Contributions to practice: this study offers a comprehensive and practical perspective on the role of the enterostomal therapist as an entrepreneur, highlighting the significance of this research as a guide for new projects within the specialty. The findings are expected to inspire the implementation of innovative strategies that promote entrepreneurship in enterostomal therapy, thereby enhancing the specialty and creating new opportunities in the job market.

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