

Celebrating Public Health Lives: **Ausilia Maria Lucia (Lia) Pulimeno, to whom the Nursing and the Healthcare Worlds owe a lot**



Prof. Ausilia Maria Lucia (Lia) Pulimeno

This journal, which often hosts scientific papers authored by nurses in different fields of Public Health, has been deeply saddened by the sudden death of **Ausilia Maria Lucia (Lia) Pulimeno**. She has collaborated for many years with our Editorial Board and since 1993 with the College of nursing professions. In 2010 she was one of the founders of the CECRI – (Center of Excellence for the Culture and the Research in Nursing), and also a member of the Board of the College of Nurses of the

Province of Rome (considered the largest in Italy), where, subsequently, she carried out the role of President of the new Order for two terms. College, Order and CECRI are strong contributors to the growth of Nursing Profession in this country, under the different aspects of assistance, research, teaching and management.

Differently from the history of Nursing which, in this Country, dates back to the XIX century, the nursing education at the

university is a pretty recent achievement. Indeed, until 1991 nurses were professionally educated in Regional Schools, and the requirement for their attendance was just 10 years of schooling.

The only occasion, then, for a few selected nurses holding the senior high school diploma to reach higher levels in nursing science was studying abroad or, in Italy, joining the 2-years courses of one of the only three “special purpose” University Schools, which offered additional education in the fields of research, teaching and management. For instance, the Istituto di Igiene (known today as Department of Public Health and Infectious Diseases), located at the Sapienza University of Rome, was the first one to open in 1965 the *Scuola per Dirigenti dell'Assistenza Infermieristica* (SDAI), with Itala Riccelli and Federica Brignone and, later, Julita Sansoni. Consequently, other universities opened schools like SDAI, such as the Catholic University with Irma Ballabio (1970) and the University of Milan (1975) with Vera Maillard from WHO and, later, Marisa Cantarelli.

But it was not until 1992 that Law 502/92 revolutionized nursing education, requiring candidates the senior high school diploma to enroll in special Sections of the Medical Schools of the Universities, in order to obtain the 3-years *Bachelor's Degree in Nursing*, that represents the requirement for Registered Nurses to practice, and 2 additional years for the *Master's Degree* in Nursing and Midwifery, necessary condition to be employed as Managers, Researchers and Teachers. Furthermore, also several courses for specialization and the doctoral degree (PhD) have been provided, at least by some universities.

In order to meet the need of *ad hoc* teachers in the nursing field, the Universities began to offer positions of Full, Associate

and Assistant Professors. The Universities of Rome (Sapienza), Turin and Verona were the first that had an Associate Professor of Nursing in the early 2000s. Today, even if their absolute number is dramatically insufficient compared to the diffusion and development of the Nursing Schools, and the cooperation of the medical profession is still unavoidable, Assistant Professors are 20, Associate Professors 22 and Full Professors 9 in the nursing field.

Exactly thirty years after the approval of Law 502/92, and the progressive passage of nursing schools to the universities, we can affirm that the social position of the nursing profession has rapidly improved: more competent but also more cultivated nurses, better accepted by the society and even considered by the medical world (particularly by those who studied also abroad) as colleagues, not simple executors of orders: this change was mainly achieved by the Law 42/99 through the elimination of the “mansionario infermieristico” or “job description” (where nurses did not have any autonomy but they were limited to performing only the described actions). Thanks to law 42/99, finally, nursing was recognized explicitly as an autonomous profession.

Lia Pulimeno, in her position as President of one of the largest Orders of Nursing Professionals in this Country, has been a protagonist during these difficult years when nursing became an autonomous profession. An indispensable help came not only from the political world or from the university, but also from those professors (not only from the field of Nursing) who, educated abroad, experienced the opportunity to work in an environment where physicians and nurses could collaborate in mutual respect for a better health. Let us say that - among those MDs - Public Health professionals were and are by far among the most active.

Our collaboration, which went on and deepened year after year, has been dramatically interrupted by death: only the

memory of things done together can mitigate the pain of disappearance and push us to keep working harder.

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