



THE TEACHING ABOUT THE CARE OF THE ELDERLY IN NURSING TRAINING: THE SITUATION IN PORTUGAL*

ENSINO DO CUIDADO AO IDOSO NA FORMAÇÃO DO ENFERMEIRO: SITUAÇÃO EM PORTUGAL

ENSEÑANZA DE LA ATENCIÓN AL ANCIANO EN LA FORMACIÓN DEL ENFERMERO: SITUACIÓN EN PORTUGAL

Silvana Sidney Costa Santos¹, Manuel José Lopes², Maria Laurência Gemito³, Maria Vitória Casas-Novas⁴, Felícia Tavares Pinheiro⁵

This paper aims to look at the teaching situation of the nursing undergraduate degree's courses about eldercare in Portugal. A documentary research on the teaching programs in 39 nursing schools, 26 schools presented syllabus units related to the topic 'eldercare' and in eight of these schools the contents of the units were identified. Using textual analysis and from the categories we concluded that the teaching regarding eldercare for the nurse training in Portugal is focused on hospital care; it is directed to the adult/elderly/family; it explores the definitions related to the aging process; it explores community issues, legislation and research. People responsible for the design/monitoring of teaching programs should include teaching regarding eldercare in the nurse training, considering that the elder population is increasing in Portugal.

Descriptors: Education Nursing; Aged; Health of the Elderly; Nursing.

O objetivo deste artigo foi verificar a situação do ensino, nos cursos de licenciatura em enfermagem, sobre o cuidado ao idoso, em Portugal. Pesquisa documental nos planos de estudo em 39 escolas de enfermagem, 26 escolas apresentaram unidades curriculares relacionadas com a temática do idoso, em oito destas identificou-se os conteúdos ministrados. Utilizou-se a análise textual e a partir das categorias verificou-se que o ensino no cuidado ao idoso, na formação do enfermeiro português, se mostra focado nos cuidados hospitalares; direcionado ao adulto/idoso/família; enfoca o processo de envelhecimento; direciona-se às questões comunitárias; à legislação e à investigação. Os responsáveis pela elaboração/acompanhamento dos planos de estudo necessitam incluir o ensino acerca do cuidado ao idoso, na formação dos enfermeiros, considerando o aumento de idosos em Portugal.

Descritores: Educação em Enfermagem; Idoso; Saúde do Idoso; Enfermagem.

El objetivo fue verificar el estado de enseñanza, en los cursos de enfermería, acerca de la atención al anciano, en Portugal. Investigación documental en los planes de estudios de 39 escuelas de enfermería. Veinte y seis escuelas presentaron contenidos del tema anciano, en ocho de estas, se identificaron los contenidos enseñados. Se utilizó el análisis textual y con base en las categorías, se ha verificado que la enseñanza de la atención al anciano, en la formación del enfermero en Portugal, se muestra centrada en la atención hospitalaria, dirigida a adultos/anciano/familia; en el proceso de envejecimiento; en problemas de la comunidad; en la legislación e investigación. Los responsables por la preparación/desarrollo de los planes de enseñanza necesitan incluir la enseñanza sobre la atención al anciano, en la formación de enfermeros, teniendo en cuenta el aumento de ancianos en Portugal.

Descriptor: Educación en Enfermería; Anciano; Salud del Anciano; Enfermería.

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¹RN. Doctor in Nursing. Associate Professor I of the Escola de Enfermagem da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande (FURG). Rio Grande, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. E-mail: silvanasidney@terra.com.br

²RN. Doctor in Nursing Science. Coordinating Professor of the Escola Superior de Enfermagem de São João de Deus da Universidade de Évora. Évora, Portugal. E-mail: mjl@uevora.pt

³RN. Doctor in Sociology. Assistant Professor of the Escola Superior de Enfermagem de São João de Deus da Universidade de Évora. Évora, Portugal. E-mail: mlpg@uevora.pt

⁴RN. Master in Human Ecology. Assistant Professor of the Escola Superior de Enfermagem de São João de Deus da Universidade de Évora. Évora, Portugal. E-mail: mvcn@uevora.pt

⁵RN. Master in Questões de Género e Educação para a Cidadania. Assistant Professor of the Escola Superior de Enfermagem de São João de Deus da Universidade de Évora. Évora, Portugal. E-mail: mfcp@uevora.pt

INTRODUCTION

The increase of the world elderly population brings about some needs in the area of health/nursing such as the adaptations the services need to have in order to provide assistance to these people in a specific manner. We also observed this need in the formation of the health professionals related to the knowledge regarding these adaptations and the specificities of the care directed to the elderly.

A forecast covering the years 2010 to 2060 showed an increase of the world elderly population, which will go from 6, 895,889 to 9, 615,189 people being 65 years or older which corresponds to an increase of 0.78% a year. The number of people who are 80 or more years of age will increase in 365,497 million, which corresponds to a growth of 6.59% a year⁽¹⁾.

In Portugal, from 1960 to 2011, there was a continuous increase in the number of people who were 65 years old or more corresponding to rate of 4.5% a year. The estimates for the next 50 years show that this age range will continue to increase about 3.5% a year. In 2060, Portugal will be the 3rd country with elderly of the UE-27 formed by: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and The United Kingdom. Regarding the group of the very old people who are 80 and more years old, it was noticed that between 1960 and 2010 it grew 8.1% a year and the forecast is to continue growing until 2060 at 4.5% a year which will triple the proportion of those people⁽²⁾.

The region of Alentejo is one of the oldest in Portugal. With a total population of 509,741 people, 129,033 (25.3%) are 65 years old or more, being 48.5% men and 51.5% women. It was noticed that in the last two decades there was an increase of 9.9% in this age group⁽³⁾.

So, with the purpose to deal with this new demographic reality some adaptation in the health services are indispensable because, as they get older, limitations may arrive related to the process of aging, which lack elements to make the activities of the daily lives of the elderly people easier. Those elements are related to the accessibility and safety of the elderly. The accessibility takes into consideration the transformation of the places and the changes of behavior in society, promoting the correct use of the spaces, assisting the different subjects with distinct needs, such as in the case of the elderly people. Under this perspective, there is a world movement which has as objective the access of everyone to products and places. There is a need of optimization and use of safe places of easy access to anywhere in the building of premises⁽⁴⁾.

Therefore, in order to make the adaptations of the areas in the health services it is necessary that the health professionals are aware of those, especially regarding these matters: aging, the elderly and old age. Regarding the preparation of the health professionals in the area of aging, the role of the nurse was emphasized, because he needs to know about the aging process and the characteristics which show the decline of the functional capacity for the orientation in the performance of daily life activities⁽⁴⁾.

The care provided to the elderly by the Portuguese nurses takes place in hospitals, in the care communitarian units, in the units of palliative care, in the family houses, in the social centers, at home and in other types of assistance to the elderly, offered by that country. The care of the elderly and providing assistance to their needs, considering their specificities, is emphasized. For that, it is necessary to have the previous knowledge in the area of Gerontogeriatric Nursing, as well as to provide care focusing autonomy, independence, self care emphasizing the paradigm of active aging, besides prioritizing the permanence of the

elderly at home with his family/friends whenever possible⁽⁵⁾.

During the Second World Assembly on Aging, there were debates on how the directed teaching of the care to the elderly is not present enough in the education of the graduation, it is more frequent in the university and post-graduation extension courses⁽⁵⁾, this reality should be revised.

Considering the increase of the elderly population in Portugal; the need of adaptation in the health services in order to assist this people in an adequate manner; the urgency in the preparation of the health professionals, especially of the nurse, to take care of the elderly, assisting his specificities, a question was brought up from this survey: what is the situation of teaching about care to the elderly, in the formation of the nurse, in Portugal? The objective of this article was: to verify the situation of teaching the care to the elderly in Portugal in the nursing courses. The main presupposition of this inquiry was regarding the importance of teaching related to the care of the elderly in the education of the Portuguese nurse.

METHOD

A documental study searching evidences regarding the education of the nurse meant to take care of the elderly in Portugal. The documental survey is a proceeding which uses methods and techniques for the apprehension/comprehension/analysis of documents either printed and/or digitalized. It shows advantages for being a method of data collection which eliminates, in most of the cases, the influence of what was experienced by the surveyor, the happenings or surveyed behaviors, eliminating the possibility of reaction of the subject to the measures of the facts⁽⁶⁾.

As document of this survey we chose the Study Plan of 39 nursing schools which, during the period of data collection in this survey, represented all of these courses in Portugal. The data collection occurred within the sites of the teaching institutions, registered nursing

courses and which complied with the following criteria of inclusion: only courses of nursing degree (1st cycle); which presented sites, whose accesses occurred through the Direção Geral do Ensino Superior, a service of the Ministério da Educação e Ciência whose study plan was available, whose syllabus unit was clear.

During the data collection no specific tool was used. The authors entered the site of the Direção Geral do Ensino Superior, a service of the Ministério da Educação e Ciência, with the purpose of identifying the nursing schools registered in it; later on we proceeded with the analysis of the respective study plans, through the sites of each institutions; afterwards, we noticed the presence of syllabus units which approached the care to the elderly, being suitable for the purpose of the survey. After that the contents were evaluated, available in the syllabus units of the surveyed schools, when the textual analysis was performed. This survey happened in January and February 2013.

It is necessary to have a critical look on the document surveyed, considering 5 steps: the context, which was the social context of the phenomenon? Author(s): who were the authors of the document? Authenticity and reliability: does the document have reliable origin? Nature of the text: legal or another? Key concepts and inside logic of the text: what is the reasoning of the document⁽⁶⁾?

The context of the phenomenon was the post-Bologna process, which started in May 1998, with the Sorbonne Declaration, and presented as the Bologna Declaration in June 1999. Such document defined a set of stages, directing the university teaching in order to build a teaching European place, worldly harmonized⁽⁷⁾, in which the nursing education was included. The authors of the documents analyzed, in this case, the study plans, were the working groups responsible for its elaborations in each institution. The surveyed documents came from the Ministério Educação e Ciência. The surveyed study plans are the most important documents of a teaching institution and published in the Diário da

República. The study plans are also presented as a legal and organizing element in the process of teaching and learning in the university courses of Portugal.

Therefore, the process of analysis was initially made up by the counting/description of the 39 nursing schools with identification of the syllabus units, year/semester being taught, type and schedule offered and type of institution, whether public or private. 26 nursing schools were identified, samples of the survey which presented syllabus units regarding to the care of the elderly, whose results originated Chart 1. Of the 26 schools, in eight of them it was possible to access/evaluate the contents present in syllabus units in which the textual analysis was used and seven categories of analysis were identified.

The textual analysis is a way to go deeper into the discursive processes in order to reach knowledge as reconstructed comprehension of the discourses. This method makes it possible to identify and isolate statements of the contents which were submitted to it, to categorize such statements and to produce texts, in such a way as to integrate description and interpretation. The textual analysis uses the system of categories⁽⁸⁾ as fundament.

Along the text some quotations/references were noticed, more than five years from publishing, thus justifying such inclusions once this is a documental

survey, with some historicity and so, it is pertinent to bring some older quotations.

As to the ethical aspects, the specific information, extracted from the study plans, it was accessed through the sites of the surveyed nursing schools, having no need of authorizations to use them once we were dealing with matters which belong to the public domain. The ethical considerations were complied with when they were kept: the same impressions found in the surveyed sites and the privacy of the surveyed schools.

RESULTS

According to the Direção Geral do Ensino Superior, a service of the Ministério da Educação e Ciência, Portugal has 39 university courses, 21 public and 18 private. The sample was formed by 26 nursing schools in which there are syllabus units related to the elderly theme, of these 13 are public and 13 are private.

The denominations of the syllabus units are diversified. It is in the 2nd year that this kind of teaching happens more often. The schedule varies from 40 hours of theoretical classes up to 840 theoretical and practical classes. Most of the schools presented the hours in ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) which varied between 5 to 60 hours. The ECTS corresponds to the performance of activities out of the classroom and the responsibility belongs only to the student or to the student together with a professor⁽⁹⁾.

Chart 1 – Characterization of the surveyed nursing schools regarding the teaching of care to the elderly in Portugal, 2013. No. of schools = 26.

Syllabus Unit	Year semester	Schedule	Public	Private
Pathology of the Adult and Elderly	2 nd /1 st	70 T		X
Nursing III – Nursing of adult and elderly I and Clinical Practice I	2 nd /1 st - 2 nd /2 nd	64TP NR	X	
Nursing of the elderly health and geriatrics and Clinical Teaching	3 rd /1 st - 4 th /2 nd	130T 482P	X	
Health of the Adult and the Elderly	1 st /NR	150TP	X	
Nursing in basic health care	1 st /2 nd	243TP	X	
Geronto-Geriatric Nursing	2 nd /2 nd	54TP	X	
Communitary Nursing	3 rd /NR	280TP	X	
Geriatric Nursing	3 rd /1 st	40T		X
Nursing II adult and elderly: style of life and comfort. Nursing IV: adult and elderly: process of health and disease and Clinical Teaching	1 st /2 nd 2 nd /1 st - 2 nd /2 nd	NR NR NR	X	
Nursing of health of the adult and elderly I and Clinical Teaching	2 nd /annual	405TP	X	
Nursing of health of the adult and elderly II and Clinical Teaching	2 nd /annual 2 nd /annual	324P 189TP 324P		
Nursing of health of the elderly and Clinical Teaching	2 nd /1 st - 2 nd /2 nd	168TP -	X	
Clinical teaching of nursing care to the adult/elderly with psychiatric problems	2 nd /2 nd	588P 252P		
Nursing of the adult and the elderly I	2 nd /1 st	8TP	X	
Nursing of the adult and the elderly II	3 rd /1 st	5TP		
Clinical Teaching III	3 rd /annual	NR		
Clinical Teaching IV	4 th /annual	NR		
Communitary Nursing I	2 nd /1 st	100TP	X	
Nursing of health of the elderly and the elderly	2 nd /1 st	840TP	X	
Clinical teaching II and Clinical teaching III	2 nd /2 nd - 2 nd /2 nd	420P/420P		
Nursing and the elderly	3 rd /NR	60T/121T		X
Nursing: health of the elderly	2 nd /NR	121TP		X
Nursing in the processes of life in the elderly people and Clinical Practice	2 nd /1 st - 2 nd /1 st 3 rd /NR	NR - NR 168T		X
Clinical teaching: health of the elderly	4 th /1 st	427P		X
Nursing of health of the elderly	4 th /1 st	126TP		
Gerontological Nursing	4 th /1 st	135T		X
Nursing of the elderly	2 nd /2 nd	NR		X
UFC III – Nursing of the adult and the elderly	2 nd /2 nd	NR		
Nursing to the elderly	2 nd /NR	NR		X

Initials: NR = Not referred. Theoretical Classes = T. Theoretical and Practical classes = TP.

Observations: the schools with the same denomination and Schedule were not repeated.

From the 26 Portuguese nursing schools which presented teaching units directed to the care of the elderly, we could access the contents taught in eight of them, from which seven categories of analysis emerged.

In those categories we noticed that the directed teaching to the care to the elderly in the education of the Portuguese nurse is focused on hospital care; directed to the adult/elderly/family; also focus the definitions related to the process of aging and surrounding concepts. This teaching was also directed to communitarian questions, the ones facing specific legislation and investigation in this area.

Hospital Care

Under this category the most referred theme areas were: the elderly in a situation of disease and self-care, continuous and palliative care, care during surgery in a first aid post, care to person submitted to complimentary exams of diagnosis, care to people with pain, care to people in their final phase of life, care *post-mortem*, assistance to the elderly with alterations in their basic human needs, interventions due to therapeutical and diagnosis judgment, the health professional must act according to the ethical judgment and promote

homeostatic styles of life, rehabilitation and re-adaptation of the elderly.

Care to the Adult/elderly/family

Under the category care to the adult/elderly/family the most frequent theme areas were: adaptation of the elderly/family to the processes of illness, process of nursing care to the adult/elderly/family, condition of health of the adult/elderly/family, therapeutical relation with the adult/elderly/family, related capacities of help to the elderly/family, evaluation of the main problems of health in the adult/elderly, changes occurred in the condition of health of the adult/elderly/family, national programs of health directed to the adult/elderly, education for the health of the adult/elderly/family, inherent aspects to the steps and roles of development of the adult/elderly.

Process of Aging

Under the category Process of aging, the theme areas which were outstanding were: The aging – development transition, aging and old age, aging and welfare, change of roles, geriatric syndromes; general characteristics of the aging process; natural process of aging; physiological alterations of the aging process or senescence; alterations inherent to the aging process; aging process – definition of concepts; psychological, social and family alterations associated to the aging process; bio-psychic-social alterations; factors that influences the aging process.

Communitarian care

In the category communitarian care, the following theme areas predominated: the elderly at home/institutionalized ; promotion of capacitating places; home visit; nursing care to the elderly; Gerontological care; needs of the healthy institutionalized elderly; resources of the community in order to improve the global quality of life of the elderly.

Concepts

Regarding the Concepts, the following theme areas were noticed: General concepts, specificity of Gerontological nursing, Gerontological/geriatric nursing, stereotypes and prejudice in gerontology, biological and psycho-social and biological theories regarding the process of aging.

Specific legislation

Regarding the specific legislation, the areas were: the Programa Nacional para a Saúde das Pessoas Idosas (National Program for the Health of the Elderly), supporting policies/nets, health, welfare and aging, promotion of health, welfare and active aging, evaluation and intervention of nursing to promote active aging.

Survey in Gerontology/Geriatrics

The last one and what is related to the Survey in gerontology/geriatrics the following theme areas was noticed: methodology of investigation in gerontology and geriatrics, practice of nursing care with scientific support in gerontology/geriatrics, history of life with the aging process.

DISCUSSION

In a survey performed in 2008, it was noticed that 25 nursing courses in Portugal had syllabus unit regarding the care to the elderly. These are important steps to guarantee a change of perception in the future health professionals regarding age and the need to be qualified and develop competence to assist the specificities of each human being under care⁽¹⁰⁾.

The teaching regarding age/elderly/old age theme is necessary. It was noticed that after this experience, the future nurses became more aware with the care to the elderly in any situation where care is taken, they start to prepare themselves for their own aging process, and they tend to start a better inter-generational relationship with their grandparents or close elderly.

These are important gains, and the fact of making these nursing students aware of the care to the elderly is primordial⁽¹¹⁾.

It is also necessary to start working on the perception of the aging process and on old age in the graduation/degree, once this can favor the exclusion of prejudice and stereotypes many times common concepts to the people regarding the elderly and they prepare future nursing professionals to assist a specific demand with competence and autonomy in the implemented actions⁽¹²⁾.

In Brazil, among the strategies of the Sistema Único de Saúde (Unified Health System) in order to qualify the health care of the elderly, the qualification of the human resources, among them, the nurse team professionals. The health institution administrators provide permanent education to the health professionals acting in them, stimulating the participation in courses, seminars and workshops which represent the care to the elderly⁽¹³⁾.

The designation of the syllabus unit regarding the nursing care needs to be re-evaluated. In Brazil, a group of study and survey are in favor of the terminology Gerontogeriatric Nursing because it means the grouping of the knowledge and of the nursing practice, originated from the general nursing, of geriatrics and gerontology, and also specificity of the nursing which takes care of the elderly in all levels of preventions, from the promotion of health and preventions of diseases until rehabilitation. It is possible to think of a syllabus unit in which it is feasible to study from the promotion of health of the elderly to more some specific diseases, such as the Alzheimer Disease, depression, accidents caused by falls, giving priority to the matters related to the promotion of health and prevention of the disease⁽¹²⁾.

It is necessary that the language used in the areas of knowledge has a similar context, so that the Gerontogeriatric nursing use common terminology, thus avoiding misunderstandings among the peers in this teaching/learning/survey⁽¹¹⁾. Under this perspective the

concepts of aging as a process from intrauterine until death, the elderly chronologically presented as being older than 60 and living in countries under development or beyond 65 living in developed countries⁽¹⁴⁾; the old age as a stage/phase of life must be discussed/re-evaluated.

The year/semester which is more adequate to the teaching of the syllabus/contents unit related to the nursing care to the elderly is the intermediate one. In the first semesters the students are focusing on more general questions and from the second semester on, or in the third semester, they already have sufficient information to better understand the specificities of the nursing care to the elderly⁽¹²⁾.

Regarding the schedule provided to the teaching of the nursing care to the elderly in the education of the nurse, the areas related to the phases of life of the human being: childhood, adult and elderly need to be seen in similar proportions. One must not superpose the other under the risk of jeopardizing the education of the nurse. The union of theory and practice is important and enriching when we notice that, through this union, the theory is fertilized and the practice enriched. Through the teaching of theory and practice we tend to link all the knowledge in order to reach interdisciplinary knowledge⁽¹⁵⁾.

The teaching of nursing care to the elderly in the same syllabus unit of the nursing care to the adult may jeopardize the education of the nurse. There is a document of the Pan American Health Organization, in the decade of 1990, recommending that we should avoid offering contents on the elderly aging and old age in a partial way and inserted in other subjects not to have the risk of diluting them or reducing them in the development of the nurse education. The recommendation is that there should be a specific subject in Gerontogeriatric, in the nursing course, whose contents regarding health promotion should be taught before the subjects regarding the sick elderly or the elderly with significant limitations in order to make it

possible for the students to develop positive attitudes to the elderly perceiving them in a more active and healthier manner⁽¹⁶⁾.

In a syllabus unit regarding health promotion of the elderly and nursing care, some contents need to be considered: matters related to the demographic/epidemiological transitions, definitions on aging/old age/elderly, Gerontogeriatric gerontology/geriatrics/nursing ; theories which explain the aging process; physiological, psychological and social alterations, in the process of aging, specific legislation directed to the elderly, services related to the elderly emphasizing alternative assistance: day center, home assistance, day hospital, institution of long permanence for the elderly, geriatric clinic, telehomecare, venues of care to the elderly emphasizing the preventions of falls, medicine therapeutics, strategy of action directed to the elderly focusing on the multidimensional/functional evaluation and on the development of the nursing process⁽¹⁶⁾ using the diagnosis evaluation and therapeutic interventions which increase/keep the capacity of self care, the management of therapeutic regimen among other actions.

With these contents, the future nurses can acquire knowledge which direct the maintenance of the welfare and autonomous life of the elderly, whether at home, in a hospital or in an institution; they understand that the care must be centered in the elderly, in their needs, in his family needs and not in his disease; they understand that a multi/inter/trans- disciplinary work must be developed, and they should enhance the health professional knowledge beyond the Gerontogeriatric area⁽¹⁶⁾.

The experience regarding the specific teaching in the area of aging was questioned by 75 nurses, technicians and nursing assistants who work in Brazilian hospitals and 56 (75.7%) didn't have such contents in their education. Only 18 (24.3%) had some information about the theme and from these 8 (10.8%), reported that this teaching was studied in subjects such as

collective health, adult health, community health and clinical-surgical nursing⁽¹⁷⁾, no surveyed subject mentioned studying specific subject on the care to the elderly.

The teaching related to the care to the elderly in Portugal, in the graduation courses, has been performed in a diversified manner regarding the used schedule, contents taught, manner of teaching/learning: theory, theory-practice, clinical teaching, trainings. A similar situation was noticed in a study made in Brazil⁽¹⁵⁾. This teaching makes the future nurses aware of taking care of a group of people with their own specificities and which represents a great number of inhabitants in the country. These situations can show the need that this teaching must be a part of the study plans of the course, in a more explicit and systematic manner.

The education in the area of care to the elderly requires that the future nurses should develop the care to this person in a proper manner. Considering that the students already take care of the elderly in almost all the practical classes, clinical experiences and training, many times facing disease, it is necessary to have a subject which directs the student to the promotion of health to the elderly and the maintenance of the active aging.

CONCLUSION

We consider that the objective of the study has been reached. The documental method was favorable to the making of the survey. As limitation we report the presence of contents of the syllabus units only in 8 schools, out of the 26 which were included in the sample.

The teaching directed to the care to the elderly, in the education of the Portuguese nurse is focused on hospital care, directed to the adult/elderly/family and the related definitions to the process of aging and concerning concepts. As another priority, this teaching is directed to the communitarian matters, the ones regarding specific legislation and investigation in this area.

As contributions of this survey, it is expected that the groups of work responsible for the elaboration and following-up of the study plans become aware of the importance of the teaching regarding care to the elderly in the education of the nurses, granting them more importance as well as operational and conceptual adequacy of the components regarding Gerontogeriatric, especially taking into consideration the ever growing number of elderly people in Portugal.

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