



The nursing innovations of St. John of God according to the first constitutions of the Fatebenefratelli Religious Order

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Introduction

Hospitals, in the mid 16th century were overcrowded by poor people which caused a progressive decay of functionality.

The hospitalized conditions were aggravated by the poor hygiene of places and people, in fact the hospital mortality was about 90%.

In 1500, the decisions of the "Council of Trent", lead to asecularization of the personnel, who were recruited in the poorer sections of the population: ex prisoners, ex prostitutes, alcoholics, poor people without any specific preparation.

St. John of God, founder of the "Fatebenefratelli", is located in this historical period of decline of assistance.

St. John of God personally experienced the patients treatment in Hospitals of the time, understanding the need for a *Reforme of Care*.

Juan Ciudad was born at Montemor-o-novo in Portugal, in 1495. When he was eight years old, he left for Spain with the Cleric who had spent the night in his home, and stayed at Oropesa (Toledo) working at the service of the home of Francisco Mayoral.

Until 1538 he performs various activities: pastor, soldier and book seller.

In 1537, attended a sermon by St. John of Avila, that provoked him such a mind disturbance that he started running through the streets and throwing himself on the ground asking for forgiveness from the Lord.

He destroyed his bookshop and continued acting strangely in this manner for several days until, considering him to be out of his mind, he was locked up in the Royal Hospital of Granada.

He left a few months later, completely calm, at peace with himself and ready to follow the Lord, by offering himself to serve others.

He placed himself under the Spiritual Direction of St. John of Avila, went on pilgrimage to the *Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe* and, on his way home, he passed through Baeza, where he spent some time with the King of Spain.

Just returned to Granada, he began his work of caring for the sick and needy poor.

He founded his first Hospital, *The House of God*, where there was room for everyone.

He started with absolutely nothing. In the development of the work of St. John of God, aims and the benefactors are particularly important. In order to raise the money to provide for the poor, he went out on the streets carrying a duffle bag on his shoulders and two pots in his hands and aloud he used to say: *"Brothers, do good to yourselves, do well for God's sake, my brothers in Jesus Christ"*. It is from this phrase that born the name "Fatebenefratelli".

He died in 1550, without leaving written rules, but his examples were such that his Brethren continued to assist the needy according the Principles of the Saint.

The main innovations in the Home of St. John of God were:

- One sick in one bed
- Appropriate diet
- Division of the sick into categories
- Work House
- A ventilated room for infectious diseases
- A ward for abandoned babies
- An Hospice, where poor and moneyless travelers could sleep. The Hospice was a large room that could accommodate up to 200 people, who were provided with fire, food and beds.

Today this innovations are normal, but, at the time, were revolutionary.

The style of care of St. John of God was also new, anticipating the times, he was able to offer a global assistance, putting the patient at the center of care.

Aim

The purpose of the research was to identify the nursing innovations introduced by St. John of God in the period 1538 – 1596 and to determine, if and how, they are related to current nursing practices.

The method has been a bibliography search.

The first Constitutions of the Order (1585 – 1587 – 1596) have been analyzed.

For each document the actors of assistance, culturally significant acts and Charisma have been identified.