

The beginnings of modern nursing in the 19th century

Początek nowoczesnego pielęgniarstwa w XIX wieku

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Summary

The emergence of modern nursing was determined by socio-political factors, including wars in the second half of the 19th century. The Crimean War resulted in reforms undertaken by Florence Nightingale in nursing care of the sick and the wounded. As a consequence of the military conflict between France and Austria in 1859 the Red Cross organization was founded.

Keywords: nursing care, Florence Nightingale, Jean Henri Dunant, Red Cross

Florence Nightingale

In addition to the socio-political, cultural and even religious elements, the formation and development of the movement for creating modern nursing were affected by two basic historical factors: wars and battles fought in the second half of the 19th century, and the feminist movement emerging at that time. The Englishwoman Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) [1] played a huge, inspiring role in this field.

She came from a very rich family, allied with many excellent and wealthy English families. Her parents' home was a rural manor in Derbyshire and a second manor in New Forest, as well as an apartment in Mayfair, where sumptuous and elegant parties were organized during the so-called „The London Season”. The young Florence made many trips around Western Europe, during which she stayed in Paris, getting to know various celebrities of cultural and political life of those times. Being a great lover of Italian operas, she often visited the theater [2].

With her social position and natural charms and virtues, she could aspire to a wonderful wife material. However, this area of life did not attract her at all, causing astonishment and concern of her parents. At the age of 25, she expressed her willingness to work as a nurse at the Salisbury Hospital, as well as the desire to create „...a kind of Protestant Order of the Sisters of Mercy, without vows, for women with subtle feelings”, with whom she could look after poor people and the sick. This project of the young Florence was strongly rejected by the family, especially since in those days in England the nurses were mostly older, simple women, known for erotic free behavior, often abusing alcohol. No wonder that parents did not accept such a profession for their well-behaved and educated daughter. „It was as if I want-

ed to be a dishwasher,” Florence recalled years later. Absorbed with the thought of providing assistance to the sick, she secretly studied medical board reports, sanitary authority brochures, the history of hospitals and shelters. Traveling around Europe, she visited hospitals, slums in big cities, and even worked for several weeks as a „Daughter of Charity” in Paris. She also visited Kaiserwerth, where pastor Theodor Fleidner fought to improve care for the sick in Germany. Carrying out a nurse's work in Kaiserwerth, she gained experience that became the basis of her further activity. At the same time, she rejected personal happiness dismissing an attractive admirer. Seized by a feeling of love, she poured her inner dilemmas and reflection on paper: „I have intellectual needs that are to be met, and that's what I would find in him. I have passions that need to be satisfied, and I would also find it in him. I have moral needs, needs to act – and I wouldn't find it with him in my life. Sometimes I think I want to satisfy my passions at all costs”. Making the final choice, she returned to a life of uncertainty and expectation. Believing that the care activities of the Sisters of Mercy are at the highest level, she went to France to work in a hospital in de la Providence near Paris. She made her two stays in this town short by a few weeks, because she was offered the position of the manager in the London Women's Clinic on Harley Street [5]. After a year, she stopped working due to an epidemic of cholera, during which she provided help to patients at Middlesex Hospital. A few months later, in 1854, when Florence was 34 years old, Russia announced the security and protection of Greek-orthodox Christians living in Turkey, primarily planning to attack the Ottoman State with the intention of seizing the sea straits: Bosphorus and Dardanelles [3]. In the defense of Constantinople, an English-French-Turkish coalition was formed, whose troops landed in Crimea. Cor-

respondents of British newspapers reported battles and wrote about the very bad conditions in the English Lazarets compared to the French, where wounded and dying soldiers were looked after by Catholic Sisters of Mercy. The outbreak of the Crimean War occurred when Florence Nightingale felt a professionally mature nurse ready to meet the challenge of the moment. For this reason, she wrote to the Minister of War in the British government, Herbert Sydney, who knew her enthusiasm and talents in philanthropic work, to send her to the Middle East. The letter missed the Sydney's letter, which he proposed the same to the extraordinary woman. After signing the necessary assignment together with a group of 38 nurses, including 18 Catholic Nuns, she came to the Ottoman State on 4th November. For the next 18 months she worked in Turkey, mainly in Skutari, a district of Istanbul, located on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. The state of affairs she found on the spot can be called terrible, even catastrophic, indicating the total collapse of the organization of medical assistance in the fighting English army. Despite the wrong information about supplying the army with sanitary and medical materials, Florence, guided by her own intuition, made various purchases in France, which proved to be extremely necessary in Skutari. She also had a large amount of money, which Macdonald, a journalist in an English magazine, multiplied. In a drastic way, in constant struggle with the army staff and officials, she put emphasis on order and cleanliness in the hospital, good, substantive care provided to the sick and the wounded, healthy food as well as underwear and clothing in an amount that met the hospital's needs. The first sign of change was the appearance of objects previously unknown in the hospital. The sick began to receive towels, toothbrushes, soap, knives, forks, combs. Upon her request, kitchens and hospital laundries were arranged. Florence drew attention to the patients' clothes, providing the hospital with huge amounts of stockings, shoes, shirts, pants and bathrobes. Along with the inflow of a large number of wounded soldiers, paying about 200 workers with their own money, she prepared appropriate rooms for placing 500 patients transported from Crimea [4].

Therefore, out of necessity, she was the head of administration. She was undoubtedly a heroic figure, but her heroism had no sentimental and romantic qualities. She brought order to the Lazarets in Skutori thanks to hard, systematic work, strict discipline, constant care of details and perseverance. Despite being rational and calm, she exuded a strength of character, a personality created to give orders and instructions as well as to overcome life's obstacles. At night, she dealt with the necessary correspondence in which, without reservations, she was describing the terrible scenes and conditions surrounding her, violently criticizing the organization of military sanitary care, accusing people who were the subject of her outrage, having no respect for anyone [5].

In May 1855 she was able to assess with satisfaction the diametrical difference in the conditions of the operation of Laza-

rets. She sent the cares who did not follow the order to England, and subordinated new groups of nurses only to herself. Her night visits to the hospital with a lamp on became legendary. Mess and lack of space in the rooms of the sick belonged to the past. Order and cleanliness prevailed, the patients' nutrition became rich and systematic. The mortality rate was an excellent measure of changes made, which drastically decreased, initially amounting to 42 deaths per 100 patients, and later 22 deaths per 1000 patients [6].

Despite many of these activities and responsibilities, she also inspected hospitals in the Crimea, traveling through the rocky hills of the peninsula on a horse or in a luggage cart. She often walked miles on foot. Her visit to Crimea resulted in a serious, life-threatening illness, as well as a conflict with some of the nurses working in hospitals and the physician, Dr. Hall. The temper of a usually very composed woman was demonstrated by the fury with which she reacted to attempts to undermine her competence and managerial position. In February 1856, thanks to Herbert Sydney, she received the title of general superior of all women's nursing services in military hospitals [7].

In July 1856, four months after the peace settlement, Florence Nightingale left Turkey and went to England. She was greeted with great enthusiasm in the country, and Queen Victoria expressed her appreciation and admiration for the merits of this extraordinary woman in a handwritten letter. The gold brooch attached to the letter read: „Blessed are the Merciful” [8].

Hard work during the Crimea war damaged Florence's health. Doctors found the medical condition of heart failure and nervous exhaustion. She suffered from frequent fainting and signs of physical weakness. Without leaving the bed for several months, she was thinking about the observations of the Skutari and the entire structure and activity of the Sanitary Department of the British Army. After recovering, she took advantage of her earlier invitation and paid a visit to the royal couple in Balmoral. During the meeting, her prince spouse wrote in his diary later: „*She used to present us with all the disadvantages of our military hospital management and proposed reforms*” [9]. Since then, she began to gather supporters of the proposed changes around her, creating the so-called „Cabinet” of influential people. One of them was Herbert Sydney. To support her efforts to reform the military sanitary service, she developed a comprehensive (800 sheets) memorial entitled *Notes on Sanitary Administration and Hospital Management in the British Army*. The Royal Commission appointed by the authorities only after Herbert Sydney took over the position of the Minister of War, managed to implement the entire reform system in 1859–1861, for which Florence Nightingale fought with such determination. At the same time, in 1859, her *Notes on Hospital Management* appeared in print, which radically changed the theory of hospital structure and the operation of closed healthcare facilities. Miss Nightingale's desire was also to reform the Ministry of War, but the death of Herbert Sydney dealt a final blow to her dream, al-

though in the years 1862–1872 she was a very influential person in this ministry.

After a turbulent period of her life, she decided to make her old desire to make nursing a highly qualified profession, widely recognized and respected. As part of this intention, she launched the *Nightingale Home and Training School for Nurses* in the St Thomas Hospital in London, in which female students were prepared for the nursing profession with the active participation of doctors and senior nurses. Her book entitled *Notes on Nursing* proves the interest in this area of education.

She spent the last decades of her life in a small house in London on South Street. She relished her fame, but her illness condemned her to being alone in the apartment. She enjoyed deserved recognition for her hard work in the field of hospital management, shelter and workhouse reform, as well as nurse education. On her initiative, a Sanitary Committee was also established for the British army stationed in India. Great politicians and aristocrats applied to her for the possibility of an audience. At a later age, she turned her attention to Christian mysticism [10].

The mental state of Florence Nightingale underwent a typical advanced age evolution: from a tart, malicious and full of sarcasm person, she became an old, agreeable, kind and fully forgiving old woman. At the same time, her appearance changed, from a slim woman with a haughty look, she transformed into an obese and smiling elderly lady. Three years before her death, in 1907, when *dementi senilis* tremendously developed, the English authorities decided to award „Miss Florence” an official award: Order of Merit. She died at the age of 90, on 13th August in London, and was buried at a cemetery in that city. At the time of death, thousands of nursing schools of the type proposed by Florence Nightingale worked all over the world.

Henri Dunant

At the end of the 1850s there was a war in Lombardy between France and Austria. The independence of the Italian provinces within the Austrian Empire in this fight was at stake. On 24th June 1859, a bloody battle took place in the fields of Solferino, near the village of Castiglione, in which 41,000 soldiers were killed. The French army won. An accidental witness to the murderous struggle was a young Swiss tourist, Henri Dunant (1828–1910). Deeply moved by the sight of thousands of wounded soldiers, he spontaneously organized medical and nursing assistance among the people of the surrounding towns. In addition, he went towards the headquarters of the French Army, reaching the immediate officers of the Emperor, Napoleon III. As a result of his intervention, captured Austrian doctors were allowed to look after wounded victims of the battle [11].

Henri Dunant lived in Geneva. He came from a well-known and wealthy family. As a small boy, he showed a great feeling of pity, as evidenced by joining the Society for Alms. In his adolescence he joined the Young Men’s Christian Association. As an

adult man, he worked at the Swiss Mine Society and conducted extensive business activities, devoting attention to humanitarian issues and all forms of mercy on the top of it. After the dramatic experiences at Solferino, he thought about measures that could be applied in similar situations. Desiring to move human consciences, he wrote and in 1862 published a book entitled *A Memory of Solferino*. Describing the tragedy of wounded soldiers, he postulated for the organization of rescue committees in the time of peace that are ready to assist the wounded during the war. Dunant’s book stirred public opinion, but the greatest response was found in Geneva, where a special commission was soon set up, which included four Swiss citizens, an Italian doctor (Ludwik Appia) and the author of *A Memory of Solferino* (secretary) [12]. At the first meeting of 17th February 1863, the commission was named the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and at Dunant’s request a plan was developed to draw interest of many European countries in the undertaking. During his stay in Paris and Berlin, Dunant was distributing invitations of the ICRC to the international congress convened in Geneva on 8th August 1864. 24 representatives of 15 European countries and the United States of America took part in the congress. On 22nd August 1864, the participants of the congress signed the so-called Geneva Convention, which became the basis of the Red Cross. The international protective sign of the organization was to be a red cross on the white background. In times of peace and war, liaison with individual states was ordered to be maintained by the International Committee of the Red Cross based in Geneva. The first president of the Committee was Gustave Moynier, who held this function until 1910 [13].

After the Congress in Geneva ended, Dunant was in a rain of splendor and honor, and all countries emphasized recognition for his work and merits. In 1867, the Swiss lost his luck: he lost all his wealth and found himself in extreme poverty. At that time he stayed mainly in France, and the concerns and worries that accompanied him resulted in a severe nervous disease. Living many years away from people, he became forgotten [14]. In 1895, in Heiden on Lake Cnstance, he was accidentally found by a well-known Swiss doctor, who cared for the misery of an old and sick man, and with his own money provided Dunant with proper living conditions in a picturesque mountain retreat. News of finding a „Father of the Red Cross” in Heiden spread quickly across Europe. As years ago, the Swiss became the subject of universal attention, as evidenced by the lifetime pension granted to the poor by the Russian empress Maria and by the first-ever Nobel Peace Prize in history, which he received in 1901. Dunant died on 30th October 1910, at the age of 83.

Further development of the international Red Cross had a huge impact on the reform of nursing care during time of peace. Rapidly spreading Red Cross organizations helping sick people, engaged both men and existing or forming women’s teams, which adopted names emphasizing their affiliation to

the Red Cross. The number of Red Cross sisters throughout the world was growing within various organizations and training institutions [12]. Since the times of F. Nightingale and the establishment of the Red Cross, we can talk about the beginnings of modern nursing [15].

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Streszczenie

O powstaniu nowoczesnego pielęgniarstwa zdecydowały czynniki społeczno-polityczne, w tym wojny prowadzone w II połowie XIX wieku. Następstwem wojny krymskiej były reformy opieki nad chorymi i rannymi podjęte przez Florence Nightingale, a w wyniku konfliktu zbrojnego pomiędzy Francją a Austrią w 1859 r. powstała organizacja Czerwonego Krzyża.

Słowa kluczowe: opieka pielęgniarska, Florence Nightingale, Jean Henri Dunant, Czerwony Krzyż
