

Portuguese Network of Nursing Science for Human Care: A report on a collaborative experience with the Watson Caring Science Institute

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Abstract

The Portuguese Network of Nursing Science for Human Care, the official representative in Portugal of the Watson Caring Science Institute (WCSI) and affiliated with the Latin-Ibero-American branch (WCSI LIA), was established in March 2021 with the goal of promoting and disseminating the development of the Nursing Science. This working group is particularly concerned with the contemporary state of nursing praxis within the scope of humanized, holistic, and integral care, and with the necessary foundation of nursing research on its own body of knowledge. This paper presents a report on the experience of this international outreach and exchange project, covering its activities from March 2021 to December 2024. This project represents a space for collective construction among 12 countries representing the WCSI, whose director is the prominent nursing theorist Jean Watson. We aim to describe the creation process of the Portuguese Network of Nursing Science for Human Care, its development, and the joint activities carried out with groups from various countries; to share the experience of the nurses who form the network; and to reflect on its dynamics and the strengthening of collaborative spaces in light of current and future challenges.

Its productivity is significant at both national and international levels, with the organization of in-person and online scientific events. However, it is important to diversify activities to include Reflection & Healing groups, Journal Clubs, and a new Workshop Series, as well as to develop a research study on the contribution of Jean Watson's theoretical framework in Portuguese doctoral theses. The implementation of the Caritas Coach® Education Program in Portuguese, organized by the WCSI, is also anticipated. The Network's main vision is to be transformative, and we will continue to disseminate knowledge throughout mainland Portugal, the islands, and Latin-Ibero-American countries.

In conclusion, since its foundation, the REDE PT has grounded its work on the universal values of the Processes of *Clinical Caritas Veritas*, within a collaborative environment that supports the development of nursing and is based on the Science of Unitary Caring.

Keywords

Scientific Network; Nursing; Humanized Care; Evidence-Based Practice; Science and Development; Experience Report.

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Introduction

The Watson Caring Science Institute (WCSI) is an international non-profit foundation whose mission is to promote the philosophy and theory of Human Caring - its ethics, theories, and practices – developed since the 1970s by Jean Watson. Its purpose is to restore and expand the deep nature of caring-healing within the unitary structure of the Caring Science as envisioned by Watson herself.¹ In Dossey's Integrative Nursing Theory, *healing* is also seen as distinct from “curing,” understood instead as a lifelong journey rather than a state or behavior - an integrative process that embraces a unitary view of the whole person interacting with the environment.²

The Portuguese Network of Nursing Science for Human Care, hereinafter referred to as REDE PT, operates as part of a dynamic group working across 12 Latin-Ibero-American countries (LIA) within the WCSI, collectively known as WCSI LIA. The teams from these 12 countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Portugal, and Uruguay) are internally referred to as “Watson groups.” REDE PT is an international outreach and exchange project on nursing knowledge and practices, created in March 2021, representing WCSI in Portugal through WCSI LIA, under the direction of Professor Héctor Rosso.

REDE PT's mission is to value, promote, and disseminate nursing practice from a holistic and humanistic perspective, grounded in Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring. This humanistic perspective in nursing draws on both Humanism and Existentialism. Humanism offers a broader view of individual potential, seeking to understand each person through the lens of their personal experiences. Existentialism is a philosophical approach to understanding life - it begins with the human being, a person who feels, acts, and lives. It emphasizes free choice, self-determination, and individual responsibility.

A nursing practice based on a humanistic perspective encourages nurses to reflect on the core values and meanings of their lived experiences, so they can share and integrate them into professional practice. This process allows nurses to feel fulfilled and to realize their potential. It is a phenomenological process of reflection focused on wholeness and synthesis, rather than logical analysis or reduction.³ More specifically, humanistic nursing practice asserts that nursing care is based on the nurse's existential experiences, which are consciously and deliberately constructed, and focuses on transformation, as well as on being and becoming a person.^{2,3} As such, it is also a developmental process that unfolds through care relationships.

The REDE PT working group adopts the concept of a network as a process of building and strengthening spaces for shared encounters and joint actions involving a range of activities and intersecting proposals – all pursued with rigor, coordination, and commitment to shared goals. The group is particularly concerned with the current state of nursing praxis in the context of humanized, holistic, and integral care, and with the essential grounding of nursing research in

its own body of knowledge. The team of clinicians and academics has conducted several studies based on Jean Watson's theoretical framework.

In alignment with Watson's holistic and global approach to personhood, REDE PT also embraces contemporary global challenges that nurses cannot ignore. This includes what Watson refers to as *cosmic caring* – caring at another level for humanity and the planet itself³ – which echoes the global agenda set forth by the United Nations in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁴

In this first phase of REDE PT's development, the primary focus is on SDG 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages – which is most directly aligned with health-related phenomena. However, following its mission of thinking and acting globally, we believe that nursing carries an inherent responsibility as both a civic and professional agent, legitimizing its engagement across all SDGs. This vision will guide us as it grows and matures.

With these principles in mind, we opted for an experience report covering the period from March 2021 to December 2024, aiming to describe the creation, development, and collaborative activities of REDE PT with the other “Watson groups”; to share the lived experiences of the nurses involved; and to reflect on its internal dynamics and the strengthening of meeting spaces with a forward-looking perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present the genesis and evolution of REDE PT, as reflected in the personal experiences of its members, the projects developed, and the activities underway.

Brief Overview of Jean Watson's Theoretical Framework

Jean Watson, a prominent nursing theorist, has been developing the Theory of Human Caring for several decades, beginning in 1978. Her thinking has evolved into what is now known as the Unitary Caring Science, formulated in 2018.^{5,6} From its initial conception, the Theory of Human Caring has been grounded in existential-phenomenological assumptions, viewing the person as more than a physical body. It involves an openness to the existential and spiritual dimensions of both caregiver and care recipient, aiming for healing in the moments of care. It is both a science and an art, emphasizing interrelated concepts such as intersubjective relationships, moral ideals, caring modalities, ethics of care, and transpersonal caring – all expressed through the *Clinical Caritas Veritas* Processes.^{6,7}

Within the field of nursing theory, Jean Watson has contributed to the consolidation of nursing as a discipline and to the profession's autonomy. For Watson, *caring* is the essence of nursing. In the Theory of Human Caring/Unitary Caring Science, the human being is viewed as an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit. Caring, from this unitary perspective, considers the person as a whole, beyond the physical dimension, encompassing emotional, spiritual, and existential dimensions. Human caring is considered transpersonal – it occurs in the contact

between the subjective worlds of nurse and patient, reaching the core of the person as a “spiritual being.”⁶ Human beings are interconnected with the universe and nature, existing in a universal interconnection between individual and environment. Caring requires the nurse to develop an expanded consciousness – self-awareness, awareness of the patient and the environment – with intentionality to create a healing space.^{6,7} Because nurses engage with the mystery of life and the vital spirit-energy of self and others during the caring moment, Unitary Caring Science is considered sacred.⁸

According to Lacerda, Santos, Tonin, and Diogo^{9(p6)}, “theoretical concepts and scientific evidence underpin practice, which in turn leads to reflection, questions, and challenges that require the evolution of theoretical frameworks, and more theory to support that same practice. It is this cyclical articulation – theorizing-action-reflection – that drives the development of Nursing Science.” In a humanistic and holistic approach, nursing must be a humanistic practice in which the professional connects with the patient through a relationship that values dignity, respect, empathy, compassion, love, and spirituality. Caring Science is seen as sacred, combining the science of doing with the essence of being, recognizing the soul and inner life in a transdisciplinary and global vision.⁶ The concept of *healing* is understood as a holistic process that involves the totality of the human being - body, mind, and spirit - in a journey of restoration and profound transformation between nurse and patient.^{6,7}

The evolution from the Theory of Human Caring to Unitary Caring Science transforms the framework into a unitary scientific paradigm – philosophically, ethically, and ontologically specific to Nursing.^{6,10} This paradigm refines the caring processes into the 10 elements of the *Clinical Caritas Veritas* Process:

- **Caritas Process 1: Embrace** – Practicing loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity toward self and others.
- **Caritas Process 2: Inspire** – Instilling faith and hope through authentic presence. Honoring one’s own beliefs and the subjective beliefs and inner life of the other.
- **Caritas Process 3: Trust** – Trusting oneself and the other, conveying confidence and intentionality, being sensitive, welcoming, and listening beyond words.
- **Caritas Process 4: Nurture** – Developing authentic, heart-centered relationships through loving presence and conscious intersubjectivity.
- **Caritas Process 5: Forgive** – Allowing for the expression of both positive and negative feelings without judgment, creating a space where the other can listen to themselves, self-care, self-know, and self-heal.
- **Caritas Process 6: Deepen** – Integrating broad patterns of knowledge, including subjective meaning and life experiences beyond personal, intuitive, aesthetic, ethical, spiritual, and empirical-scientific knowledge, along with emancipatory knowledge.^{7,11}
- **Caritas Process 7: Balance** – Engaging in authentic teaching for self-care, self-knowledge, and self-regulation – for self and others. Understanding that information is not

knowledge, knowledge is not understanding, understanding is not internalization, and only internalization leads to wisdom.

- **Caritas Process 8: Co-create** – Establishing a healing environment grounded in love and trust, with the nurse being aware of the healing space.

- **Caritas Process 9: Minister** – Honoring human dignity by caring for basic needs as a sacred gift and act of healing.

- **Caritas Process 10: Open** – Embracing the infinite and the evolution of consciousness, accepting existential and spiritual unknowns, and being open to miracles and mystery.

The most recent concept in Unitary Caring Science⁷ involves three forms of *ethics* – the ethics of Belonging, of Face, and of Hands – based on the philosophy of Levinas and ethicist Knud Ejler Løgstrup. The ethic of belonging is based on the assumption of unity and uniqueness: before we are separate beings, we are part of the “Infinite Field of Universal Cosmic Love” and the sacred circle of life and death. The ethic of face, as a face-to-face connection, is fundamental to human evolution and survival. When we look into another’s face, we behold the mystery and infinity of the human soul; in doing so, we reflect our own inner infinity. The ethic of hands is based on the idea that the nurse holds life metaphorically and literally in their hands. Unitary Caring Science emphasizes that the heart and hands are connected, and that love, care, compassion, and inner truth manifest through the nurse’s hands as instruments of healing.

Creation of the Portuguese Network of Nursing Science for Human Care: WCSI’s Representative in Portugal

The REDE PT, representing the Watson Caring Science Institute (WCSI) in Portugal through WCSI LIA, was founded in March 2021 by Professor Paula Diogo following an invitation from the Director of WCSI LIA. A founding group was formed through invitations to academic and clinical nurses with experience in developing projects and producing scientific knowledge aligned with Jean Watson’s theoretical framework and related topics. REDE PT’s mission is to enhance the value of nursing as a discipline and practice grounded in a holistic and humanistic approach, centered on Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring. It aims to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge that can positively influence the advancement of nursing at both national and international levels.

Its main objectives are to:

- Promote the study and development of the Theory of Human Caring and its multiple applications, particularly in care modalities that enhance the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of both patients and nurses;
- Disseminate research and evidence-based practices rooted in Human Caring and supported by Jean Watson’s theoretical framework;
- Contribute to the continuing education of its members and all nurses and nursing students;

- Encourage a culture of research and development (R&D) within healthcare and educational institutions by sharing information, involving students from all levels of nursing education, organizing scientific and educational events, cultural sessions, and other initiatives;
- Promote the dissemination of the Theory of Human Caring among nurses, healthcare institutions, nursing schools, and academic entities in an appropriate and unbiased manner, enhancing the reputation of the profession and its practices;
- Stimulate collaboration with national and international organizations in various scientific areas, including partnerships with project teams and peer networks.

Thus, REDE PT seeks to create an environment conducive to knowledge exchange and reflection, fostering the evolution of nursing praxis by connecting clinical practice with critical reflection on Human Caring. The primary assumption underpinning this aim is the importance of theoretical development in nursing, which since the 1950s has significantly shaped the discipline, education, and practice. It has contributed to forming a unique body of knowledge that guides nurses' reflections and intentions in what they say, feel, and do. In short, theorization provides the foundation for nursing action. A theoretical contribution offers better and more comprehensive explanations of nursing phenomena, helping predict events and solve practice-based problems while also promoting epistemological development and strengthening Nursing Science.⁹

REDE PT's specific goals include:

- Sharing caring experiences and scientific knowledge based on Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring, promoting the reconfiguration of clinical nursing practices;
- Scientific dissemination through publications and other scholarly activities grounded in Jean Watson's theoretical framework;
- Publicizing scientific output and including students from all three levels of nursing education;
- Exploring and discussing topics of common interest to group members, especially those related to Human Caring research and practice.

To achieve these goals, a key partnership was established in January 2023 with the Lisbon School of Nursing (Escola Superior de Enfermagem de Lisboa – ESEL), extending to collaborative research with the Lisbon Research, Innovation, and Development Center in Nursing (CIDNUR), along with indispensable support from the Watson Caring Science Institute – particularly Professor Jean Watson, WCSI LIA Director Professor Héctor Rosso, and Executive Director Julie Watson. Additional institutional support was provided by the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (School of Health) and the University of the Azores (School of Health).

Currently, REDE PT includes 22 academic and clinical nurses and a Student Section representing nursing students from all three education levels (with a one-year term and a variable number of participants). These members work in higher education and healthcare institutions in mainland Portugal, the islands, and abroad. The working group fosters a collaborative environment of mutual sharing and growth, recognizing that nursing development depends on coordinated efforts across all professional domains. New members are integrated into REDE PT either through direct invitation or by submitting a written request. Selection involves an interview with the coordinator and another member – usually the head of the Education Unit – followed by feedback from the full group. Final approval is the responsibility of the REDE PT coordinator. Figure 1 outlines this integration process.



Figure 1 – Integration process for new members.

The Student Section includes nurses and nursing students from undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs who actively contribute to ongoing activities and events. Undergraduate students – typically from their 2nd, 3rd, or 4th years – collaborate for a 12-month period through partnerships with healthcare and academic institutions. This section aims to foster the academic and professional development of students, enabling them to deepen their understanding of Jean Watson's Caring Theory. Through participation in REDE PT's initiatives, students gain knowledge and shared experiences that promote compassion, critical thinking, and holistic perspectives. A curriculum rooted in Jean Watson's *Clinical Caritas Veritas* Processes^{6,7} encourages openness in thinking, moving away from a purely technicist mindset and embracing both physical and emotional-spiritual dimensions. New members undergo an integration process that includes an initial meeting with the head of the student section, during which they are introduced to the goals, structure, and ongoing projects of REDE PT. Mentorship is provided either by the section head or a full-time team member. Figure 2 illustrates each stage of this integration journey.

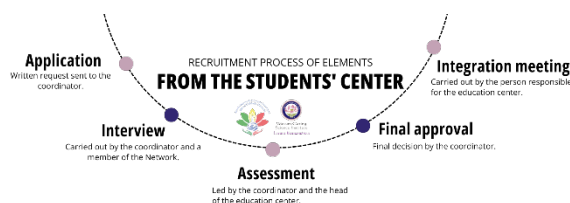


Figure 2 – Recruitment process for Student Pole members.

Structure and Operations

REDE PT is organized into four distinct sectors, each with a specific focus. It is coordinated by Professor Paula Diogo and composed of founding members, new members, a Student Section, and collaborators, all of whom are integrated according to the processes illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. The organizational chart is presented in Figure 3. The Secretariat is composed of an elected member and carries out its duties in coordination with the coordinator and the other sectors. The Scientific Council consists of members who hold doctoral degrees, while the Executive Committee is responsible for organizing scientific and cultural events and managing social media communication and public image.

The Education Unit includes the Student Pole and is responsible for organizing educational activities and overseeing the integration of new members and students. The Research Unit is composed of the “Watson Network Groups,” members involved in research projects, and those dedicated to scientific production and publication. This unit is also responsible for promoting and coordinating research-related activities.

The founding group's first activity was the development of the internal Regulations, which serve as a foundational and organizational tool for all national and international REDE PT initiatives. According to the Regulations, internal meetings are held quarterly, with all members and student representatives invited to participate. These meetings are chaired by the coordinator and supported by the secretary, who drafts the minutes.

The meeting agenda generally includes: welcoming new members; updates and announcements; presentation and discussion of activities organized by each sector; and, annually, the preparation of the Activity Report. Meeting minutes are sent to all members for feedback and approval and are ultimately reviewed and validated by the coordinator.

These internal meetings are key for identifying needs, planning and coordinating new initiatives, and evaluating activities. They also serve as vital sources of inspiration, sharing, and understanding of Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring/Unitary Caring Science.

Joint meetings with the other “Watson groups” and the Director of WCSI LIA are equally enriching. These are held quarterly with the country coordinators and chaired by Professor Héctor Rosso. Each meeting begins with a mindfulness moment – a holistic practice that fosters group connection – followed by presentations of ongoing activities and discussions of future projects, which are reviewed and validated by the WCSI LIA Director.

A particularly significant event was the international scientific meeting “*An Encounter with Dr. Jean Watson*”, held in Portugal on June 27, 2023. During this event, a private group meeting was held with Professor Jean Watson, Director of WCSI. The discussion focused on the work being done by REDE PT. This was a profound and emotional moment, as each member received a card listing the 10 *Clinical Caritas Veritas* Processes, in Spanish, directly

from Jean Watson. Her care for each participant, the strength and energy she radiated, and her unwavering belief in the Unitary Caring Science deeply moved everyone, marking a unique moment in our lives. During the meeting, the group also received a Certificate of Recognition from Dr. Watson, acknowledging REDE PT's contribution to advancing the Science of Human Caring in Portugal.

This dynamic has enabled members to meet both online and in person, collaborate actively, get to know each other, and engage deeply with the concepts, definitions, assumptions, and all the elements related to the Theory of Human Caring/Unitary Caring Science. Each member of REDE PT embarks on a journey of self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-care, moving toward unitary caring and inviting more people into this transformative process.

Initial Exchange Activities with the Brazilian Group

The first international scientific event organized by REDE PT was the 1st Webinar Series titled *"Jean Watson's Nursing Theory of Human Caring: From Conception to Practice"*, which took place online on September 20, 22, and 24, 2021. The event was strongly supported and encouraged by the Brazilian Network of Unitary Caring Science. This joint initiative provided an opportunity to share clinical practices and reflect on ongoing research in both countries.

REDE PT also collaborated with the Brazilian counterpart group to organize the 1st International Meeting entitled *"Human Caring in 21st Century Nursing: Education, Research, and Clinical Practice"*, held online on November 14 and 15, 2022. The event featured the participation of Jean Watson herself, which was especially enriching, as she emphasized *"The Seven Sacred Sutras"* of the third paradigm of her theory. Dr. Watson's contribution offered valuable insights into the evolving elements of her theoretical work.

The Brazilian "Watson group" played a key role in encouraging and supporting the early activities of REDE PT by sharing their experience and motivation.

Knowledge Production and Dissemination Activities

In addition to the events mentioned above, REDE PT has developed both in-person and online activities. Notable examples include:

- On November 19, 2021, the group launched an online workshop series titled *"Humanization Themes in Nursing"*, hosted on Zoom. The first workshop, *"Hope in Human Caring"*, gathered around 100 participants and provided a space for reflection on the importance of hope as rooted in the Theory of Human Caring.
- On January 31, 2022, the second workshop was held: *"Modalities of Human Caring: From Concept to Practice"*, with over 120 participants. The session focused on holistic care modalities aligned with Watson's theory, such as Reiki, massage, biodanza, and others.
- On June 7, 2022, the third workshop was organized under the theme *"Humor in Nursing Care"*, attracting more than 150 registrants. It promoted discussion on the integration of humor into care practice and its relevance for comfort and well-being.
- On February 1, 2023, the second edition of the workshop *"Hope in Human Caring"* was held.
- On March 14, 16, and 18, 2022, the 2nd International Webinar Series *"Promoting Human Caring across the Life Cycle"* took place, in partnership with the "Watson groups" of Brazil and Uruguay. With over 300 registrants, the event provided a meaningful space for cultural exchange and reflections on care experiences in different settings.
- On June 27, 2023, the in-person international event *"An Encounter with Dr. Jean Watson"* took place with 150 participants. It was an emotional and rewarding day. For many attendees, meeting the theorist in person affirmed the significance of her work in naming and legitimizing the intersubjective processes that constitute the therapeutic relationship.

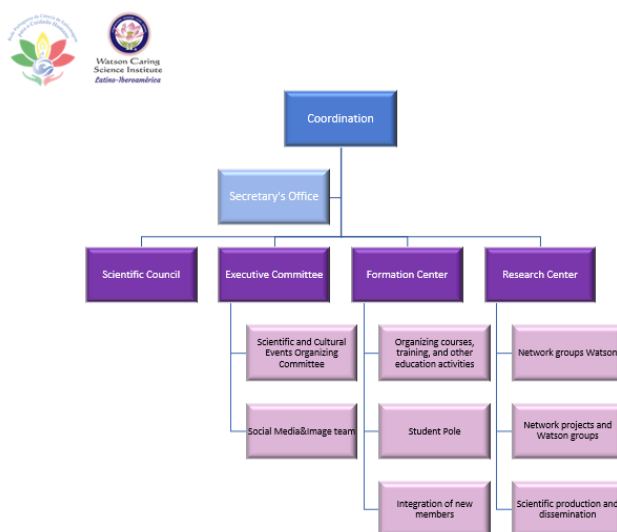


Figure 3 – Organizational chart of REDE PT.

- On November 21-22, 2024, a new series of “*Humanization Themes in Nursing*” workshops were held at the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, School of Health, with 40 participants. Topics included: “*Caring for Self and Others: Emotional Management for Nursing Students*”, “*Positive Emotional Experiences: Being More Self-Aware*”, and “*Caring for Children and Families Affected by Abuse: A Holistic Approach*.”

On December 4-7, 2024, during the 1st Child Health Seminar at the University of the Azores, School of Health, REDE PT delivered another edition of the “*Humanization Themes in Nursing*” workshop series. It focused on emotional management for health professionals caring for children, youth, and families, with 25 participants.

Collaboration with Peer “Watson Groups” as a Strategic Resource for Dissemination and Outreach

Collaboration with peer “Watson groups” has proven to be a vital strategy for expanding the dissemination and visibility of REDE PT. In this context, several significant joint activities were conducted:

- Webinar “The Advancements & Challenges of Caring Science”, held on September 22–23, 2022, with participation from all WCSI LIA countries.
 - International Webinar on the Science of Human Caring: Global Development and Implementation of Nursing in Caring Science, on August 17, 2023, with participants from all WCSI LIA countries.
 - Webinar “Information Systems and the Theory of Human Caring”, on June 15, 2024, in partnership with the Watson group from Spain.
 - International Webinar on the Science of Human Caring: “Literacy in Caring Science”, held on September 11–12, 2024, with participation from all WCSI LIA countries.
- In addition to these international initiatives, REDE PT also participated in invited activities organized by national and international institutions, which contributed to its growing visibility and relevance. Highlights include:
- Participation in the 1st Anniversary Celebration of the Brazilian Network of Unitary Caring Science on October 11, 2021, via a live session titled “*The Use of the Theory of Human Caring in Clinical Practice in Portugal*”.
 - Participation in the III International Colloquium on the Philosophy of Caring: Person-Centered Care, as part of the panel “*Caring*”, organized by the Coimbra Nursing School (ESEnFC) on November 18, 2021.
 - Presentation of REDE PT at the School of Health of the University of the Azores, on January 21, 2022, at the invitation of the School’s Director.
 - The Watson Caring Science Institute Latin-Ibero-American branch (WCSI LIA) offered scholarships to REDE PT members to attend an international scientific event. As part of this opportunity, three oral communications were delivered at the 43rd Annual International Association for Human Caring (IAHC) Conference, held in June 2022.

Scientific Production and Publications

In terms of scientific production and publication, several noteworthy contributions include:

- Collaboration in the book titled “*Los Milagros y Misterios*” (2022), published by the Lotus Publishing House of the WCSI, which features chapters authored by REDE PT members: “*The Story of a Pediatric Nurse*” and “*Extraordinary Stories Kept in My Memory*”.
- Publication of the eBook from the 1st International Meeting of REDE PT, “*Human Caring in 21st Century Nursing: Education, Research, and Clinical Practice*” held on November 14-15, 2022. ISBN: 978-989-33-5029-4.
- Publication in the journal *Pensar Enfermagem* of the article titled “*Unitary Caring Science: Caritas Compassion Transpersonal Theory*” authored by Jean Watson, following the scientific event held in June 2023. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.56732/pensarenf.v27i1.296>
- Publication in the journal *Revista de Enfermagem Referência* of the scientific article titled “*The Contribution of Theory-Building to the Development of Knowledge in Nursing*” (2024), in collaboration with the Watson group from Brazil. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.12707/RVI24.18.34542>

Caritas Coach® Education Program

The Caritas Coach® Education Program (CCEP) is an innovative six-month course offered by the Watson Caring Science Institute. It is designed to prepare healthcare professionals, educators, caregivers, and leaders for the practice and implementation of Caring Science and the Theory of Human Caring across various contexts and dimensions. The course is taught in both Spanish and English and brings together participants from countries where these languages are widely spoken, including Spain, Mexico, Argentina, the United States, Chile, and Canada - reinforcing its international and intercultural nature.

This is an immersive experience - intellectually, ethically, personally, and aesthetically - that combines theoretical learning with the development of reflective practices. Integrating Human Caring Science into professional practice strengthens ethics and values by aligning them with each person’s unique perspective, fostering both personal and professional transformation.

Program Structure

The course is organized into online modules and includes interactive discussions, personal reflections, and monthly Zoom sessions. These components allow participants to incorporate the philosophy and values of Caritas® into their daily personal and professional practices. The combination of synchronous monthly meetings and asynchronous activities through the Canvas platform provides flexible learning, enabling participants to progress at their own pace and adapt the learning process to their needs and availability.

The faculty supports participants throughout the course, guiding the implementation of personal Caring Science projects - essential for developing the competencies required to become a Caritas® Coach. These projects have

a direct impact on the participants' work environments by promoting observable and concrete changes.

Methodologies and Practices

The CCEP adopts an innovative teaching-learning approach, integrating self-reflection, authentic dialogue, and the exploration of wisdom traditions. Its purpose is to empower participants to live and apply Caritas® principles across all areas of life. Throughout the journey, participants are encouraged to cultivate holistic awareness and a comprehensive vision of Human Caring, emphasizing healing, love, and respect for human dignity.

The faculty guides participants through virtual meetings, supporting the development of their Caring Science projects, abstracts, posters, and portfolios.

Transpersonal caring practices are central to the course, and participants are encouraged to develop a daily routine of self-care and reflection, which includes meditation, journaling, and study. This not only deepens the integration of Caring Science but also fosters personal growth and spiritual renewal.

Caritas Coach Competencies

Participants develop the ability to practice and teach the 10 Caritas Processes, gain fluency in the language of Caring Science, and apply evidence-based practices alongside subjective ways of knowing. The goal is to foster informed praxis that places human caring, integrity, and dignity at the heart of all environments.

Currently, REDE PT includes three Caritas Coaches. Below are reflections from each:

“On a journey of self-awareness and reflection - essential competencies for becoming more competent, respectful, and empathetic individuals and caregivers - we are empowered to foster the growth and development of both others and ourselves, honoring each individual's unique needs and identities”. (R1)

“A course grounded in reflection and self-discovery, guided by a coach, is a unique opportunity for personal and professional development in nursing - especially in contexts of high vulnerability”. (R2)

“The Caritas Coach Education program is an opportunity for sharing, reflection, and growth - personally and professionally. Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring offers a unique perspective within nursing and professional practice, where every person is seen as unique and valuable. The uniqueness of the course lies in the support of a dedicated coach over six months of training, during a journey of discovery, goal-setting, and professional transformation that deepens our consciousness”. (R3)

Participants regard the course as a path to self-knowledge and growth. Their testimonials highlight the value of a dedicated coach and the opportunity to apply theory to daily practice - enriching the discipline of nursing.

Social Media: A Strategic Resource for Disseminating the Theory of Human Caring and Promoting Health Literacy

Social media has proven to be an essential resource for sharing and disseminating the Theory of Human Caring,

promoting health literacy, and circulating the scientific output of REDE PT. This communication channel allows outreach to a diverse, cross-border audience, including nurses, other healthcare professionals, nursing students, and the general public.

By leveraging the broad reach of virtual platforms, REDE PT seeks to convey its core message and strengthen its impact. A key objective is to maintain a high and consistent publication frequency, which remains a challenge in the fast-paced and ever-evolving landscape of social media.

Some of the content shared by REDE PT includes:

- Phrase of the Week: Inspirational posts highlighting key quotes from the Theory of Human Caring, promoting reflection – mainly using literature authored by Jean Watson.

- Nursology: Posts sharing concepts and innovations in nursing to enhance followers' understanding of contemporary theories and practices, often referencing the *Nursology* website.

- Promotion of WCSI Events: Announcements and updates on workshops, conferences, and other initiatives organized by the Watson Caring Science Institute, inviting followers to engage in significant events in the field.

- Articles and Research Studies: Links to recent scientific publications, along with summaries that facilitate understanding and encourage further reading on relevant topics in nursing and humanized care.

Posts often include infographics and image carousels that help explain complex topics, as well as short, engaging videos with testimonials that balance dynamism with informative content. On commemorative dates or during special events, REDE PT employs storytelling techniques.

The *Social Media & Image* subgroup has encouraged the active involvement of all members, reinforcing the idea that each one plays a vital role in building a strong and impactful digital presence. This collective effort transforms social media into more than just a communication channel – it becomes a platform for connection, learning, and the expansion of REDE PT's mission.

Contribution of Jean Watson's Theoretical Framework to Research in Portugal

As a scientific discipline, nursing has the mission of producing and disseminating its own body of scientific knowledge – knowledge that underpins how clinical and academic nurses think, feel, and act.⁹ In Portugal, doctoral theses grounded in specific nursing theoretical frameworks have significantly contributed to this objective.

Through knowledge translation, nursing is able to robustly respond to the needs of individuals who require health and nursing care, as these responses are informed by theoretical frameworks that guide best practices.¹²

In this context, in June 2024, the design of a study began to explore the contribution of Jean Watson's theoretical framework to the development of doctoral theses in nursing across Portuguese universities. The study has received scientific support and recognition from the Watson Caring Science Institute and includes WCSI LIA

Director Professor Héctor Rosso as a member of the research team.

This is an exploratory-descriptive study, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research strategy involves online searches in the repositories of Portuguese universities and the Open Access Scientific Repositories of Portugal (RCAAP), to identify full-text doctoral theses in nursing, beginning with the earliest completed in the country.

The methodology includes document analysis, univariate descriptive statistical analysis to characterize the theses, and discourse analysis to identify the elements, components, and contributions of Jean Watson's theoretical framework in dissertations across different Portuguese institutions. In addition, qualitative content analysis will be conducted on data gathered from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a purposive sample of thesis authors, allowing for deeper reflection on how these works have contributed to the nursing discipline and clinical practice.

Impacts of the Theory of Human Caring on Clinical Practice

The following are four reflections from nurses who are active members of REDE PT, illustrating not only the applicability of the Theory of Human Caring in clinical practice but also its transformative influence on the nurses themselves.

“As a nurse for 18 years, I have seen the Theory of Human Caring progressively take on greater significance in the care I provide. I recognize that when I completed nursing school, I had limited understanding of how to operationalize the principles proposed in this theory. Over time, through study and personal growth, I began to integrate its elements into my practice. Today, in every care relationship, concepts such as ‘therapeutic use of self - central to Dr. Jean Watson’s theory - resonate deeply within me. In any care setting, beyond theoretical and practical knowledge, nurses also draw on internal resources to build the therapeutic relationship, enabling the patient to heal and improve their health status. At this stage of my professional development, it no longer makes sense for me to provide care without using the Theory of Human Caring as my guiding framework.” (R1)

“Throughout my professional journey as a nurse, I’ve realized that – even before I fully understood Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring – its principles were already present in my practice, albeit unconsciously. A commitment to the person’s well-being, compassion, and respect for human dignity were always there, even without an explicit theoretical foundation. Now, reflecting on the Clinical Caritas Veritas Processes, I see how these values have shaped my approach to care and guided my nursing interventions. In the past, these elements were intuitive: I prioritized person- and family-centered care and developed empathic relationships, but I wasn’t fully aware that they reflected the theory’s core principles. Today, with Dr. Watson’s framework clearly in mind, the Caritas Processes guide my practice more consciously and intentionally. Caring is no longer just a duty - it’s a deliberate and reflective act that seeks to transform both the experience of those I care for and my own experience as a caregiver. One of the most inspiring aspects of the Theory of Human Caring is

how inclusive and deeply human it is, welcoming and respecting all identities. This is especially meaningful to me, as I strive to ensure healthcare is accessible and relevant to everyone. The theory not only promotes equity in care but also encourages us to recognize each individual as a unique being with their own story, beliefs, and needs. The Portuguese Network of Nursing Science for Human Care has allowed me, as a student, to embrace this theory consciously and permanently, shaping both my nursing interventions and the way I care for others. Whether through research or sharing Jean Watson’s scientific work, or through daily contact with REDE PT members, I feel part of a world that is far from being purely technical – and much closer to people.” (R2)

“Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring is a holistic approach that transforms nursing by focusing not only on the physical treatment of patients but also on emotional, spiritual, and relational care. In clinical practice, applying this theory allows for a more humanistic and person-centered perspective, fostering deep, compassionate relationships that facilitate healing. The 10 Caritas Processes are essential to authentic care, highlighting love-kindness, empathy, respect, and compassion to promote trust and emotional-spiritual support. The nurse develops sensitivity to others, creating a healing relationship based on authenticity, mindful presence, and sacred attention to basic needs. The theory also acknowledges the spiritual dimension of care, including the patient’s beliefs, values, and meaning of life. By building a relationship centered on the patient’s life story and creating mutual trust, the nurse ensures that the patient feels heard, understood, and respected – as a whole being with body, mind, and spirit. Social and economic conditions are also considered, ensuring care responds to real needs. In this context, self-care is essential. Jean Watson emphasizes that healthcare professionals who care for themselves – emotionally, physically, and spiritually – are better equipped to provide authentic and effective care. A nurse who takes care of themselves is more empathetic and present in their interactions with others. Promoting spirituality by respecting and supporting patients’ spiritual beliefs is central to Watson’s theory, leading to more personalized and values-aligned care experiences. Ultimately, the Theory of Human Caring transforms nursing through compassion, awareness, and humanity.” (R3)

“Over 35 years of professional experience, I have had the opportunity to care for mistreated children and youth and their families, always from a human and holistic perspective that acknowledges the emotional dimension of nursing practice, grounded in human values of caring. Providing care in these situations requires establishing relationships of closeness and trust, enabling the expression of feelings between nurse, child, and family – aimed at promoting development, protection, and safety. This approach is deeply aligned with Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring, which centers on transpersonal caring and is operationalized through the Clinical Caritas Processes. By being authentically present in the caring moment – with sincerity and openness – I was able to convey affection, love, support, and respect. Over time, this facilitated a trusting and healing relationship. The Clinical Caritas Process links caring with love, aiming to maximize pediatric patients’ health and reduce neglect or maltreatment. For me, the Theory of Human Caring/Unitary Caring Science offers a pathway for caring for mistreated children/youth and their families. It has helped me see the human being as transcendent and value their lived experience – focusing on transpersonal care that emerges from

interaction. In my professional practice, the theory opened new perspectives and allowed me to deliver more humanized pediatric care, guided by therapeutic intentionality. It also supported advanced clinical practice by promoting leadership rooted in valuing team members' competencies, collaboration, and the creation of supportive clinical environments. Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring has provided me with many opportunities for personal and professional growth". (R4)

Challenges for a Transformative and Global Vision of Nursing

Nursing Science can be significantly strengthened through a dynamic integration of education, research, and clinical practice, as promoted by the so-called "Watson groups" representing WCSI LIA. This approach allows a broad professional community of nurses – nationally and globally – to benefit directly from the contributions of the Theory of Human Caring, not only through digital technologies, in-person events, and publications, but also through reflection groups and other knowledge- and experience-sharing activities. This professional network fosters a nursing way of thinking that has a direct impact on care delivery, transforming clinical practice through the ongoing strengthening of the discipline.

The integration of academic and clinical systems promotes a fundamental transformation in nursing by bridging education, research, and practice. REDE PT contributes to the consolidation of a nursing community committed to this articulation – between pedagogy, research, and clinical care – promoting engagement with the wider community and encouraging peer collaboration. This movement strengthens nursing as a discipline and supports its continuous evolution through an open dialogue with society and its emerging paradigms, ensuring a constant renewal of knowledge and practice aligned with the vision of Human Caring.

Furthermore, the exchange between the "Watson groups" and the expansion of REDE PT contribute to the integration of multidisciplinary knowledge and to the discussion of critical contemporary issues, such as technological advances. According to Jean Watson, the transition of our time into virtual worlds and cyberspace offers a unique opportunity to introduce and co-create global Caritas-Communitas networks – spaces that help us discover how to unite nurses and others across time and space, contributing to a new mind-to-mind order.⁹

Through this vision, REDE PT becomes a space for sharing and development, where the professional nursing community can connect and exchange knowledge, promoting a practice that values Holistic and Human Caring. It is a practice that evolves in harmony with social and technological transformations, establishing itself as a global force for the transformation of nursing.

Another major vision of REDE PT is to serve as a catalyst for transformation, where nursing practice evolves in response to the needs of human beings and society. According to Kerouac et al.¹³, nursing thought must be inspired by a continuous quest for knowledge and expansion, where each experience challenges personal limits – just as nursing evolves by integrating the Theory of Human Caring into every dimension of clinical practice. Rooted in the paradigm of transformation, and echoing the pursuit of self-knowledge and personal growth explored by Kerouac in her work, REDE PT fosters a journey of collective deepening, in which each member is committed to reflecting and expanding the boundaries of human care. This aspiration forms part of a greater whole – one that seeks to contribute to a transformative and global vision of Nursing.

Conclusion

Since its foundation, the Portuguese Network of Nursing Science for Human Care has grounded its work on the universal values of the *Clinical Caritas Veritas* Processes. Within a collaborative, inclusive, and inspiring environment, the network has created spaces for sharing, building, and reflecting on nursing knowledge and practice.

The activities carried out over the past three years demonstrate the network's commitment to developing a science that is truly humanistic, integrative, and centered on the person and the therapeutic relationship. Through events, publications, educational offerings, research projects, and clinical applications, the Theory of Human Caring/Unitary Caring Science has proven to be a powerful driver of personal and professional transformation.

As a result, REDE PT has gained national and international visibility, becoming a reference point for nurses and students who seek to deepen their understanding and application of the theory. Its connection to the Watson Caring Science Institute and the Latin-Ibero-American branch (WCSI LIA) has fostered an environment of collaboration, innovation, and cultural exchange.

Looking toward the future, the Portuguese Network aims to strengthen its presence across Portugal and Latin America, diversify its activities, expand its research agenda, and continue to support the training of nurses and students. The dissemination of the Theory of Human Caring and the implementation of practices grounded in love, compassion, ethics, and scientific rigor will remain central to this path. REDE PT thus continues to affirm itself as a space of care, thought, and action – where nursing is practiced and envisioned as a science and art of caring, with deep ethical, philosophical, and relational roots.

Authorship and Contributions

PD: Conception and design; Drafting of the manuscript; Critical revision of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

IS: Drafting of the manuscript; Critical revision of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

EC: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

MRM: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

MLR: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

TA: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

LR: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

PB: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

AP: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

MC: Drafting of the manuscript; Approval of the final version of the manuscript and assumption of responsibility for it.

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