

## International Contacts of Czechoslovak Nurses, 1920–1938 (student's contribution)

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The study has been inspired by the paper of Susan McGann who discusses the international courses organized in London in the 1920s and 1930s, in which nurses from Czechoslovakia regularly participated.

**Aim:** Using the experiences of Czechoslovak nurses abroad from 1920–1938, to give evidence of the origins of some topical problems in present nursing (the transformation of education for paramedical staff, the question of nurse competencies).

**Methods:** The paper is based on the content analysis of articles and short reports published in two main Czechoslovak professional journals of the period: Reports of Czechoslovak Red Cross/Zprávy Československého červeného kříže (in total 204 issues from 1920–1936) and Czechoslovak Hospital/Československá nemocnice (in total 96 issues from 1931–1938).

**Results:** Research has proved intensive foreign contacts of Czechoslovak nurses on several levels (international courses, conferences, meetings of the international nursing organizations, activities of foreign nurses in Czechoslovakia, translations of professional publications), supported by the Czechoslovak Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies, the American Red Cross and the Rockefeller Foundation. Even when the first nursing school in Prague was established according to principles used at the school in Vienna and even when Czechoslovak nurses kept personal and correspondence contacts with colleagues from different countries of the world during the whole searched period, the orientation to the Anglo-American milieu proved to be crucial for gaining new experience in the field of nursing. Particularly the courses organized at Bedford College and Royal College of Nursing in London were of special importance.

**Conclusions:** The content analysis of proposed changes debated at the international nursing conferences of the inter-war period has proved to be inspiring for present discussions on the transformation of education for paramedical staff and on the question of nurse competencies.

### KEY WORDS

The transformation of education for paramedical staff, nurse competencies, foreign contacts, professional journals, Czechoslovakia, inter-war period

### INTRODUCTION

The World War I confronted nursing with new challenges, whose implementation was often impeded by the limits of the previous development. Establishing of foreign contacts, which represented an important source of exchange of experience and new knowledge, was even more important for designing modern concept of nursing care. Dealing with the mass-spreading epidemics of early post-war years was the urgent task of the new Czechoslovak state. In that context, it was necessary to speed up the gradual promotion of the medicalization principles into practice, which necessarily entailed the upgrading of skills of nursing staff. The research therefore focused

on the forms of international cooperation and contacts in particular with those countries, which most influenced the Czechoslovak nursing. At the same time, it focused on capturing the key suggestions for the transformation of education and competence of nurses, which were discussed at international conferences during the interwar period.

### DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STRATEGY

The work is based on a content analysis of articles and small reports published on pages of two professional journals, key for the development of the nursing profession during the First Republic. The idea was to go through all 17 years of the journal, i.e. 204 issues

Reports of Czechoslovak Red Cross (Zprávy Československého červeného kříže) published in the years 1920–1936 and 8 years of the journal, i.e. 96 issues of Czechoslovak Hospital (Československá nemocnice) from the period of 1931–1938. Research of Reports of Czechoslovak Red Cross were carried out in National Medical Library in Prague, which is the only place in the Czech Republic, where it is possible to study this periodical because of copyright protection, and only in digital form. The Czechoslovak hospital journal, which is also available in paper form, was researched in the Scientific Library in Olomouc. Contacts of the Czechoslovak registered nurses with foreign countries constitute the main criterion for subject classification of articles and reports from both magazines. Whereas those contacts had different forms, we made a short-list, which focused on two following aspects: 1. Internships abroad and 2. Participation in international conferences dealing with improving the conditions of nursing staff and curricular modifications of nursing schools. We did not address reports of internships and conferences, which focused more on social work than on healthcare, no matter how lively discussions about linking the two areas took place throughout the period studied. This choice was motivated by a desire to determine under greater scrutiny, than that offered by current literature, what particular foreign experiences influenced interwar Czechoslovakia nursing, while creating a sufficiently representative data set for future international comparison.

## TEXT OF LITERATURE REVIEW

There were efforts to create a nursing school even before the war. Act on public health administration from 1870 provided the legislative framework for its formation. In the context of emancipation efforts of Czech women, it was decided to organize regular courses for nurses in Prague in 1874 that is even considered the first Austrian school of nursing by some authors (1). However, the courses lasted only a short time and they had to be terminated in 1881 due to the impossibility of practical training in hospitals. The real first nursing school in the monarchy (Rudolfinerhaus) was established in Vienna in 1882. Teaching of medical disciplines prevailed over practical nursing courses in its curriculum. Female adepts, who were expected to manage the senior positions in major provincial hospitals across the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, were sent to this school with two years (after 1914 three years) study program. One of them was Sylva Macharová, a later director of the Czech Nursing School in Prague (1923–1931) (2). Two more nursing schools were founded in Vi-

enna before the First World War: a school in Vienna's General Hospital in 1904 and a school established by the Red Cross in 1913. In 1904, the Association for the Advancement of status of nurses was established in Prague, initiating foundation of a school at General Hospital in 1914, following the Vienna model. However, its opening stalled for lack of teachers – doctors. Teaching in Czech and German nursing school was finally started in May 1916. There were only fifteen students accepted on each of the two schools (3). Teaching of medical disciplines prevailed over practical nursing courses in curricula of the schools in Vienna and Prague. A fundamental change occurred in the post-war era, when Alice Masaryková invited American nurses to Prague in order to raise the level of nursing education in Czechoslovakia.

## Czechoslovak Red Cross

The First World War contributed to enhancing the prestige of the Red Cross, founded in 1863. The Czechoslovak Red Cross (CSRC), established on February 6, 1919, played a key role in addressing the health and social consequences of war in the newly established Czechoslovak Republic. It was also important in building the nursing education, because the need for skilled nursing staff was very urgent at that time. The International Committee in Geneva recognized the CSRC on December 1, 1919. The organization was admitted to the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on January 11, 1920. Among its main objectives, there was the promotion of national organizations of the Red Cross, improvement of population health, prevention of infectious diseases, alleviation of suffering, protection and assistance to military and civilian victims of war and unrest and assistance in natural disasters and calamities. Activity of the Red Cross was established on four basic principles proclaimed in 1921: impartiality, political, religious and economic independence, internationality and equality of national societies (4). Whereas the CSRC also shielded the Czech nursing school in Prague, namely from 1920 until 1931, when the state took over its management, its first and long-time chairwoman Alice Masaryková (1919–1938) established contacts with the Paris centre of the Rockefeller Foundation and ensured that the American specialist participated in teaching at this school with its financial assistance. These specialists familiarized the students in different countries around the world with new approaches applied in the United States at that time. The mentioned foundations is one of the leading organizations providing financial resources in the health sector globally. It played an important role in inter-war Czechoslovakia.

## The role of the Rockefeller Foundation

This philanthropic organization and private foundation, founded by John D. Rockefeller in 1913, tried to support schools in the medical field, educating skilled and confident nurses, that would be much less dependent on doctors than as it was generally customary in Europe that time (5). Among other things, the foundation established the first school of Hygiene and Public Health at Johns Hopkins University and later at Harvard University. Czechoslovakia was chosen as the first country in Eastern Europe for its projects, partly for political reasons, as the Rockefeller Foundation considered it a perfect bulwark against Bolshevism. Moreover, there were relatively few inhabitants and the implementation of planned innovations did not require too much funds (6).

The introduction of the changes was a necessity. Nursing profession faced problems arising from low social prestige in the interwar period. Nurses were perceived as mere relief force for physical and mechanical work; their professional qualifications did not receive appropriate attention. This implied lack of financial rewards and poor social conditions. Frances Elizabeth Crowell (1874–1950), prominent American nurse and social worker, devoted considerable attention to these issues within the visitation of Czechoslovakia. In her report of 1922 addressed to the New York headquarters of the Rockefeller Foundation, she reported that nurses were accommodated and catered directly in the rooms of patients. Only nuns fared better, because the monastic seclusion ensured their accommodation and privacy. The report refers to lack of free time to relax, poor sanitary conditions and very inadequate salary, which amounted to barely half the income level of officials and teachers. Crowell quite aptly likened the status of nurses to position of better house cleaners, while the doctor performed the position of lord (7). At that time in Czechoslovakia, the majority view was that the physician needs an education, while nurse needs a training. Their tests also corresponded to this theory, putting greater emphasis on rational solutions of practical problems rather than on analytical and conceptual skills of nurses (8).

## Experience from abroad

Foreign experience represented a significant impetus for implementation of necessary changes in the given situation. Czechoslovak Nurses familiarized with them on several levels: through the teaching of foreign specialists, participating in international conferences and congresses, international study visits, courses and training, and studying fo-

reign literature translated into Czech and published on the pages of specialized magazines. Mainly the Reports of Czechoslovak Red Cross systematically monitored the situation abroad, both in the form of brief reports published in the special section called Ošetřovatelská hlídka (Nursing Guard), and through extensive analytical articles. Information from international conferences, study visits of the Czechoslovak grantees and translations of important texts from foreign magazines were published also in Czechoslovak hospital since the early thirties. Although the articles in both journals were primarily targeted at workers in nursing, they also helped to transform the perception of the role and status of nursing staff in the wider public, especially among doctors and government officials with the competence to implement the necessary changes.

Foreign activities of the first graduates of nursing school in Prague were slightly significant from the beginning, although the number of registered nurses was relatively small. They were the ones who tried to bring new impulses to the often highly conservative attitudes of professional public. Czechoslovak Red Cross, League of Red Cross Societies (established in 1919), The American Red Cross and the Rockefeller Foundation paid foreign studies for scholarship holders. Among the first ones in 1920 there were V. Černá sent on a three-year study to Teachers College in New York, F. Růžicková, who has completed a three-year nursing school in Boston, and B. Březinová, a trainee in Gardener hospital in the state of Massachusetts. E. Tobolářová was granted a scholarship for a three-month study trip to the St. Tomas hospital in London in 1923 and M. Vlčková-Kuncová completed a course in public health at the University of Toronto in 1924 (9). S. Klinderová was sent to the United States in 1927 (10). The training centre for nurses at Vassar College in New York, one of the first colleges for women was the most common place of study visits in the US.

## International courses

Prestigious eleven-month international courses, organized since 1920 by the League of Red Crosses on Bedford College and later at the Royal College of Nursing in London for selected graduates of nursing schools, which were expected to manage the leading positions, were among the most popular ones. The Florence Nightingale International Foundation, established in cooperation with the League of Red Crosses and International Council of Nurses (established in 1899) organized the courses since 1934. The training focused on hospital administration and

teaching in nursing schools or public health (11). There were ten delegates included in each group, representing typically ten different countries (12).

It was at that time an extraordinary opportunity to exchange experiences with nurses from around the world. Program of the courses was very intensive. In the morning blocks, there were lectures on personal and public hygiene, national economy, psychology, social work, sociology and eugenics; meanwhile the afternoons were filled with visits of various health and social facilities together with observations in advisory centres. There were also evening lectures concerning the functioning of the health sector in different countries. Grantees enthusiastically portrayed the conditions at nursing schools in their reports, emphasized the very good social background of pupils (each nurse had her own room in the House of nurses; there were enough bathrooms available as well as sports facilities and swimming pool). The participants highly rated courses for their professional level as well as an inspiration for initiatives in the field of social and health care (13).

13 grantees from Czechoslovakia completed courses in London during the years 1920–1938 (14), the nurses were sent to courses even every year in the twenties: 1920–1921 A. Němcová, 1921–1922 M. Anzenbacherová, 1922–1923 A. Suchá, 1923–1924 J. Molnárová, 1924–1925 J. Filipová (15), 1925–1926 A. Šindlerová (16), 1926–1927 A. Mánková (17), 1927–1928 A. Rypáčková (18). In the academic year 1935–1936, it was Olga Matyášová, who passes the courses. She was a head nurse in State nursing school in Prague and shared her experiences in comprehensive report. Matyášová stated that in social institutions, which she visited, there was one nurse and three to four students per room with twenty to thirty patients with the fact that this nurse was also a chief teacher of the students. The author analysed the organization of health care and how it is financed, and devoted to work schedule of nurses, including obligations of nurses during night shift. An interesting figure is that those nurses had a six-month paid leave after three or six years of service. According to Matyášová, each hospital with more than a hundred patients was entitled to establish its own nursing school, taking advantage of cheap labour force of the students. Particular attention was also paid to the constructional organization of each department and employing of different types of nurses there in the UK. State tests had a written, oral and practical form and formed a prerequisite for the nurse to be state-registered (19).

A report called Nursing and health services in families (20) was written by Anna Mánková, one of

the first graduates of Czech nursing school in 1918, a head nurse and the first author of directives. The author recounts the experiences from the monthly practice in psychiatric hospital Oxford County and City Mental Hospital in Littlemore. She describes in detail the construction layout, equipment of rooms for patients and doctors, nurses' office, and emphasizes that care for mentally ill patients takes place mainly on open departments. Frequent stays outdoors for dining and sleeping together with working therapy (cleaning, making beds, kitchen help, knitting, weaving, gardening and workshops) played an important role here. There were qualified nurses in the hospital, graduates of a six-year study with state exam from general nursing and care of the mentally ill patients (21).

Tatiana Schaufussová, a qualified nurse from the Czechoslovak Red Cross, who visited the International Nursing Congress in London in July 1937, described her visit of Middlesex Hospital and attached nursing school in London. The author starts with a brief description of hospital equipment (700 beds, 300 nurses and 100 students, modern technical equipment to facilitate the work) and then deals with the organization of nursing education. She notes that candidates for the study passed through a three-month preliminary course with a final testing. Subsequently, the passed a three-month trial service at the bedside of the patient on the clinic. If the candidate proved, she could apply for a study (22). Outside the Anglo-Saxon world, Czechoslovak nurses went also to France (23) and Scandinavia (24).

### Participation in conferences

Conference of directors of nursing schools, which took place in Paris in March 1922, was a significant event in the early twenties. Its purpose was to exchange experiences and get to a mutual agreement to fix problems that the European nursing schools faced. Among the speakers of the conference, there were delegates from Europe, the United States and New Zealand. We can name for example Sophie Mannerheim (1863–1928), promoter of modern nursing in Finland and president of the International Council of Nursing, or the American directors of nursing schools in Prague, Warsaw and Belgrade. Criticism of the current conditions pointed to several areas. Conference participants firstly noted that experienced nurses best understand the needs of the patient and know, what is important for running the hospitals. They raised reminder in defence of head nurses, charged with the leadership of pupils in hospital, that should not be overburdened by other



things. Duration of practical training was discussed and there were even proposals for extension of the two-year school to three years, as it was already in England, France and Belgium (25). Also noteworthy is the report of an international conference of nurses organized in Rome in September 1928 by the Italian Red Cross, concurrently with the 16th Conference of the International Union Against Tuberculosis, which focused on the fight against social diseases and teaching methods leading to improvement of nursing school students' observational skills (26).

Subject of negotiations of nursing committee at the International Conference of the Red Cross in Brussels, which was held from 6 to 11 October 1930 and where Alice Masaryková represented Czechoslovakia, was a proposal for the standardization of education and training for nurses developed by the International Nursing Council. They proposed the length of two years as a minimum duration of study, recommended an emphasis on ethics in theoretical and practical courses and to include lectures on the history of nursing. An important point was the adoption of the principle that there should always be a qualified nurse in position of school director, not a doctor, and that only fully qualified nurses were awarded with a title of nurse. Socially nurses should not only complete the entire nursing school and special training under this proposal, but they should also have a diploma in midwifery (27).

Debate at the International Congress of Nurses in Paris in July 1933, it was crucial in many ways, demanding paying special attention to the selection of students, to define their competencies clearly and to improve the social conditions of nurses (28). There was also a criticism that too many lessons are devoted to medical subjects at the expense of nursing (29). In connection with discussions on the Welfare State, this conference identified the ideal type of social nurses with a full grounding for the care of patients as well as for the social care, which would become the link between hospital and family. The United States and England did not join this opinion, especially promoted by Germany (30). Professional public in Czechoslovakia was divided on the issue: Graduates and teachers of nursing school preferred the Anglo-American system of education of highly qualified paramedical staff, trained at selected universities (31), whereas some doctors and workers of CSRC, who had responsibility over volunteer nurses, more inclined to traditional education, where the nurse is viewed as a dependent helper to doctor, needing just a lower type of education (32).

## Nursing education abroad

The school, founded at Yale University in 1923 with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, was a highlight of American nursing education and education of nurses was adapted to curative and preventive medicine here. According to information of A. W. Goodrich, Dean of the school, teachers' effort was to exclude "non-nursing" courses, closely combine theory with practical training and emphasize the importance of preventive medicine. The school accepted candidates, who completed the whole high school, with a particular emphasis on chemistry, biology and psychology. Tuition lasted three academic years and consisted of 15% of theory and 85% of practice (33). Graduates received a Bachelor of Nursing. The proportionality of practical subjects is interesting as well: practice in hospitals (57%), care for the mentally ill patients (8.5%), service at the ambulances (8%) and public social and health care (6.3%), care for patients with tuberculosis (2.6%) and in the creche (2.6%).

Information about workers in the public health sector in France in that time (34) and about creation of small nursing stations in Finland in places where the infrastructure was not built and where there was no doctor (35) could inspire Czechoslovak nurses as well. Czechoslovak nursing in Carpathian Ruthenia in fact faced a similar situation at that time.

The state of nursing in Germany in the early thirties is described in an essay written by Erna Abendroth (1887–1959), the first German nurse with a university degree of Doctor of Philosophy, whose text was translated and published in Reports of CSRC by graduate nurse Julie Molnárová in 1932 (36). Nursing care played an important role in Germany that time, the nurses' task to encourage and strengthen the willingness of patients to recovery and maintain the health was appreciated. Unlike the situation in Anglo-Saxon countries, German hospitals were usually funded from public resources and therefore both municipality and state could affect the nursing directly. Level of care was considered very good at that time, because it was performed by graduated nurses with specialized education from nursing schools established by Charity, Diacony, the German Red Cross and state and municipal hospitals. However, nurses were still perceived as versatile assistants of doctors and only in rare cases were in leading positions, especially in schools. Demand for trained nurses increased in connection with increasing demands on their skills and with regard to reduction of working hours, established to no more than

60 hours per week by the state. However, some of the major hospitals in Germany introduced an eight-hour working shift at the time. Studies at school of nursing lasted two to three years and the prerequisite was passing at least ten years of school, special disciplines required complete secondary education. There were 451 state-recognized nursing schools with a two-year study program and 80 schools with three-year program in Germany in the early thirties. Social conditions allowed nurses to have a decent, but modest standard of living. Organization of nurses in Germany was not uniform. Besides Charity, Diacony and the Red Cross, there was also the Association of national nursing organizations (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der weiblichen Krankenpflegeorganisationen in Deutschland, established in 1929), which brought together professional associations.

Specialized press also reported the situation in Poland (37) and Hungary (38) occasionally, where the Rockefeller Foundation contributed to building of nursing schools, as in Czechoslovakia. Especially in comparison with Poland, the situation in Czechoslovakia was not in the early thirties as favourable as it seemed to many American observers at the time when the foundation started to operate in Central Europe. There were five nursing schools in Poland by 1930, while in Czechoslovakia there was still only one. Study lasted 28 months; curriculum included theoretical lectures and practical exercises under the guidance of qualified registered nurses. The Polish Red Cross (Polski Czerwony krzyż, founded on January 18, 1919), just like the Czechoslovak Red Cross in Czechoslovakia, led the administration of nursing schools, organized refresher courses for lower staff, head nurses in hospitals and certified nurses in social care. Major health and social authorities as well as the wider public supported nursing profession in Poland, which was significant for the future development.

## OUTCOMES

Information about the various forms of nursing abroad, published by both analysed journals, played an important argumentation role in improving the quality of nursing care and expanding the network of nursing schools in interwar Czechoslovakia, particularly in the thirties. Putting the issue of nursing education into the international context demonstrates how foreign experiences of nurses sent to foreign study visits and conferences contributed to formation of education, and how these experiences helped to find arguments for a shift from theoretical lessons conducted by doctors to practical teaching

managed by educated and experienced nurses. At the same time, the experience acquired helped the nurses to raise awareness of the importance of the nursing profession and served as argumentative basis for discussions with government officials and medical community about profile of modern nurse that would manage a broad spectrum of care provided in hospital and community facilities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research has demonstrated through concrete examples that the issue of the transformation of education and skills of nurses, which is discussed by non-medical healthcare professionals today, based on experience from abroad, was one of the frequent themes already in the interwar period. The main impulses came from the USA and Great Britain. However, a hesitant attitude of the competent authorities caused that enforcement of necessary changes frequently took a long time. Expanding the network of nursing schools was particularly slow in comparison with other Central European countries. In this way, the situation changed dramatically after 1945 and again after 1989.

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