



# Universidade Federal do Piauí Nursing Museum: a milestone in professional history and memory

*Museu da Enfermagem da Universidade Federal do Piauí: marco na história e memória profissional*  
*Museo de Enfermería de la Universidade Federal do Piauí: hito en la historia y la memoria profesional*

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to describe the experience of participating in the creation of the *Universidade Federal do Piauí* Nursing Museum and its contribution to preserving the history and memory of the profession. **Method:** this is a descriptive experience report about the work carried out to organize, store and preserve documents and objects relating to nursing in Piauí, which culminated in the inauguration of the *Universidade Federal do Piauí* Nursing Museum, belonging to the Nursing Department of the Health Sciences Center. **Results:** a report of the events that preceded the creation of the museum, the definition of the environment intended to organize, store and preserve documents and objects, which culminated in the inauguration of the museum space and the establishment of its collection, which includes clothing, written, iconographic and journalistic documents, historical nursing works, institutional and biographical objects, as well as nursing and healthcare objects. **Conclusion and implications for practice:** the site contributes to preserving the nursing history and memory, as it is a space for exhibition, research and ongoing training that enables us to reconstruct the identity and history of this profession.

**Keywords:** Memory; Museums; Nursing; Nursing Education; Nursing History.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** descrever a experiência de participar da criação do Museu da Enfermagem da Universidade Federal do Piauí e sua contribuição na preservação da história e da memória da profissão. **Método:** trata-se de relato de experiência de natureza descritiva acerca do trabalho desenvolvido para organizar, guardar e preservar documentos e objetos relativos à enfermagem piauiense, que culminou com a inauguração do Museu da Enfermagem da Universidade Federal do Piauí, pertencente ao Departamento de Enfermagem do Centro de Ciências da Saúde. **Resultados:** relato de fatos que antecederam a criação do museu, a definição do ambiente para organização, guarda e preservação de documentos e objetos que culminou na inauguração do espaço museológico e a constituição de seu acervo que inclui vestimentas, documentos escritos, iconográficos e jornalísticos, obras históricas de enfermagem, objetos institucionais e biográficos, bem como objetos de enfermagem e assistência à saúde. **Conclusão e implicações para prática:** o local contribui para a preservação da história e memória da enfermagem, por tratar-se de um espaço de exposição, pesquisa e formação permanente que possibilita a reconstrução da identidade e história da profissão.

**Palavras-chave:** Enfermagem; Ensino de Enfermagem; História da Enfermagem; Memória; Museus.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** describir la experiencia de participar en la creación del Museo de Enfermería de la *Universidade Federal do Piauí* y su contribución a la preservación de la historia y memoria de la profesión. **Método:** se trata de un relato descriptivo de experiencia sobre el trabajo de organización, almacenamiento y conservación de documentos y objetos relacionados con la enfermería en Piauí, que culminó con la inauguración del Museo de Enfermería de la *Universidade Federal do Piauí*, perteneciente al Departamento de Enfermería del Centro de Ciencias de la Salud. **Resultados:** relato de los acontecimientos que precedieron a la creación del museo, la definición del entorno de organización, almacenamiento y conservación de documentos y objetos, que culminó con la inauguración del espacio museístico y la constitución de su acervo, que incluye indumentaria, documentos escritos, iconográficos y periodísticos, obras históricas de enfermería, objetos institucionales y biográficos, así como objetos de cuidados de enfermería y de salud. **Conclusión e implicaciones para la práctica:** el sitio contribuye a la preservación de la historia y la memoria de la enfermería, ya que es un espacio de exposición, investigación y formación continua que permite la reconstrucción de la identidad y la historia de la profesión.

**Palabras clave:** Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Historia de la Enfermería; Memoria; Museos.

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## INTRODUCTION

Museums and memory centers store and preserve works and artifacts that constitute collections that represent the history and culture of a people. When gathered in museum spaces, they become objects that make up sites of knowledge production, which mediate the social construction of memory and favor interdisciplinarity.<sup>1</sup>

Bearing this in mind, the museum, as a space for knowledge production, originated in the Alexander Palace, founded by Ptolemy Philadelphus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century b.C., in Alexandria, and functioned as a multidisciplinary teaching and research institution, with funding from the State.<sup>2</sup> This conception persists today as a space for teaching and research, with a variety of objects of study available to researchers and students, creating points of intersection in contexts of social practices.<sup>1</sup>

In Brazil, the creation and reformulation of museums have been taking place in the context of public policies, promoted by the State and related to the interest in training and educating people and society,<sup>3</sup> in the construction of a collective identity in constant development, in accordance with the sociopolitical moments experienced.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, Brazilian nursing, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has also shown concern with memory and professional identity, expressed in the creation and maintenance of institutional collections,<sup>1</sup> considering that all types of memory storage and preservation are essential, since it is through them that knowledge of the legacy built by nursing professionals in Brazil is perpetuated.<sup>4</sup>

In this effort to perpetuate nursing knowledge and history, the *Universidade Federal do Piauí* (UFPI) nursing course stands out, the first in the state of Piauí, established in 1973, on the *Ministro Portela Campus*, located in the city of Teresina, the state capital. Its first entrance exam was held in the same year, although the creation of the Nursing Coordination only took place on October 6, 1975.<sup>5</sup>

The UFPI nursing course, over its 50 years, has consolidated itself as an instrument for the professionalization of nursing in the state. Thus, Professor Benevina Maria Vilar Teixeira Nunes's work stands out, who dedicated herself to studying and disseminating studies in the area, with a main focus on nursing history in Piauí. In 2008, the aforementioned professor created the Nursing and Health Education and History Study Group, which she led until 2021, when she passed away. With valuable intellectual and social capital acquired during her journey, Professor Benevina Maria Vilar Teixeira Nunes aimed to create and maintain a space for nursing collection storage and preservation in Piauí.

With the death of Professor Benevina Maria Vilar Teixeira Nunes, the social commitment to building the *Universidade Federal do Piauí Nursing Museum* (MEUFPI) was taken over by the university's academic community. It is considered that the establishment of this memorial space goes beyond a locus to tell nursing history. It has become a space of social commitment, with the preservation of nursing trajectory, promoting the development of research in nursing history, making the nursing class and professional identity visible in the state of Piauí and in Brazil.

Considering the above, this report aimed to describe the experience of participating in the creation of MEUFPI and its contribution to preserving nursing history and memory.

## METHOD

This is an experience report on the work developed to organize, store and preserve documents and objects related to nursing in Piauí, which culminated in the inauguration of MEUFPI. The process took place over nine months, between January and September 2023, and involved the use of human, material, technological and financial resources, in addition to institutional partnerships that were essential for developing the project.

Experience reports refer to the description of a fact and, most of the time, present the experience of an individual or a specific group of professionals regarding a certain situation. There is still no specific guideline to guide the writing of this specific type of publication.<sup>6</sup>

This experience had the participation of four professors from the UFPI Department of Nursing, who led the process and acted in the coordination and sub-coordination of activities, together with two doctoral students, who participated in the research and cataloging stages, and a professor from another higher education institution, who contributed with her experience in managing museum spaces.

To organize and preserve the collection, digitalization equipment was used, such as scanners and high-resolution cameras, in addition to Photoshop software, which allowed the digitization and creation of digital copies of historical documents and photographs. Excel was used to catalog and organize items systematically, ensuring that each piece was properly identified and registered in a database. Specific materials were purchased to preserve and display the collection, such as display stands, mannequins, televisions and panels.

The creation of MEUFPI was supported by UFPI's central administration, which provided financial support and the physical infrastructure for implementing the museum. It also had the support of private institutions that contributed with the donation of interior planning services, manufacturing and assembly of displays, printing of photographs and creation of visual identity.

Data analysis was performed based on the experiences of the authors of this study during the creation of MEUFPI, and the discussion was developed considering nursing history frameworks.

This experience report describes the activities developed by the authors and followed current legislation regarding ethical precepts,<sup>6</sup> and does not require assessment by a Research Ethics Committee.

## RESULTS

### Museum creation background

MEUFPI was a dream that developed over several years. In 2017, planning for its implementation began, when the university's senior administration was contacted to discuss the area for its location, defined by the Department of Nursing itself, and the process for authorizing changes to the site's physical structure began.



**Figure 1.** Professor Viriato Campelo, Vice-Dean of UFPI, and Professors Patrícia Carvalho and Ana Santos (left), Tereza Galiza and Livia Carvalho (right). Teresina, Piauí, Brazil, 2023. Source: MEUFPI, 2023.

In the meantime, between comings and goings, in the following years, significant political changes occurred in the administration of federal public higher education institutions, with blockages and cuts in the budget of these institutions, with consequent limitation of public spending, under the justification of respecting the so-called “spending ceiling rule”, in force in the country. Moreover, the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic postponed the plans that were underway for a few years. Furthermore, following all these obstacles, on July 11, 2021, Professor Benevina Maria Vilar Teixeira Nunes suddenly left us by a fatal accident.

Only at the beginning of 2023, efforts to create MEUFPI were resumed. During this period, a committee composed of the Department of Nursing head professors and coordinators was created with the aim of seeking support from senior management for the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the UFPI undergraduate nursing course. It is worth noting that, among these actions, the greatest emphasis was given to the creation of the museum.

In addition to institutional support, the committee established a partnership with the UFPI visual arts course and with the company *LUCAIA Artes e Ofícios*, which designed and executed the interior design project. It also had a partnership with the company *Parler Comunicação*, which created the museum’s visual identity. Figures 1 and 2 record meetings of the aforementioned committee in January and May 2023, respectively.

**Infrastructure, organization, storage and preservation of the collection at the *Universidade Federal do Piauí* Nursing Museum**

The museum’s interior design covered an area of 120 square meters, which was divided into three rooms, where seven



**Figure 2.** Professor Viriato Campelo, Professor Paulo Vasconcelos and Professors Patrícia Carvalho, Ana Santos and Livia Carvalho. Teresina, Piauí, Brazil, 2023. Source: MEUFPI, 2023.

settings were organized to facilitate access and consultation by the community, distributed in the following sequence: Nursing Pioneers; Nursing History; Nursing Education; Nursing in Piauí; Nursing at UFPI; Nursing in Hospitals; and Nursing of the Future. Figure 3 depicts some of these settings.

The documents and objects that make up the MEUFPI collection were donated or acquired by members of the Nursing and Health Education and History Study Group. Among those donated, the most notable in clothing collection is Maria Otávia de Andrade Poti's uniform, the first nurse from Piauí, donated by her family, which also includes an armband with the Maltese cross embroidered in red and a gold brooch, the *Escola Anna Nery* symbol, from which the aforementioned character graduated.

The documentary collection includes copies of magazines, minutes books and technical reports donated by the *Revista de Enfermagem da UFPI* (REUFPI), the *Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem* (ABEn) and the Vincentian sister Abrahíde Alvarenga. As for the biographical objects, the most notable are the files on nursing procedures and a brooch from the *Escola Anna Nery*, donated by nurse Maria Vieira de Moares. The nursing and healthcare objects were donated by UFPI and *Hospital Getúlio Vargas* (HGV), considered one of the largest public hospitals in the state of Piauí, located in Teresina.

### Costume collection

In the "Nursing Pioneers" setting, three costumes representing prominent figures in nursing are on display, with Florence Nightingale being the most famous person in the world. The costume chosen to represent this character was a replica of the uniform she wore when providing nursing care during the Crimean War.

Anna Justina Ferreira was the national character chosen, whose replica of the clothing used to represent her was based on her attire in the painting by Victor Meirelles de Lima in 1873.

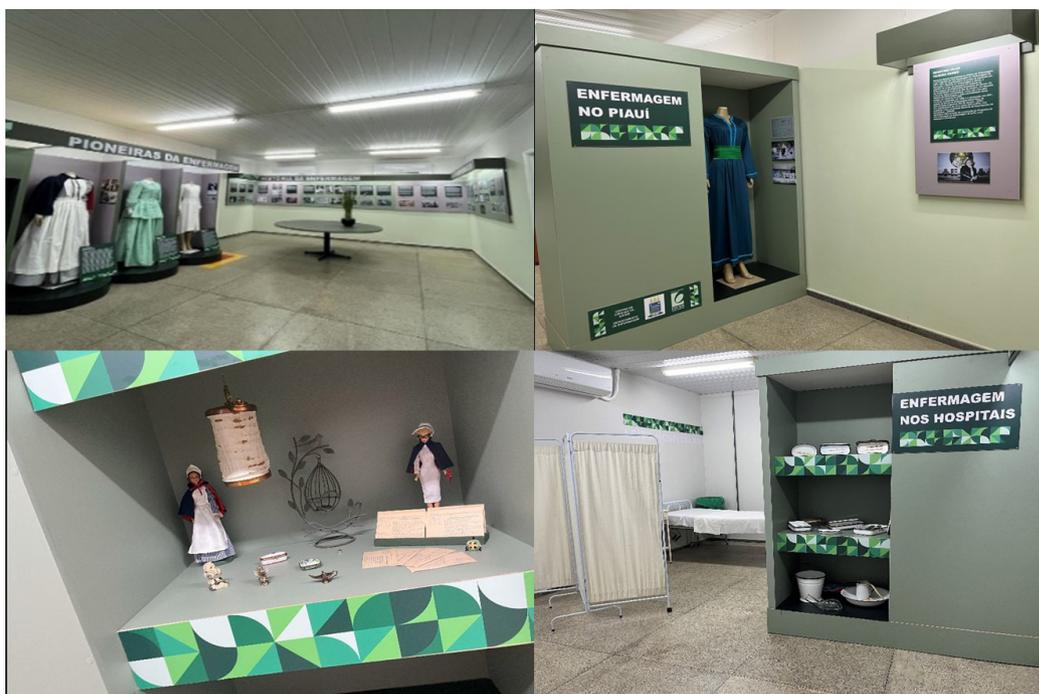
The local character honored was Maria Otávia Poti, a graduate of the *Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery* in 1943, selected for having been the first nurse from Piauí to perform this function at HGV, in Teresina, in 1944. The clothing is original, worn by her in her professional activities at the aforementioned hospital, according to her family

In the "Nursing in Piauí" setting, the character honored was Professor Benevina Maria Vilar Teixeira Nunes for her professionalism, knowledge, commitment, ethics, generosity, humility and humanity in teaching nursing. The outfit chosen to represent her was a replica of the gown she wore at her graduation ceremony on July 20, 1979, selected because it was a moment of great prominence for the character, when she was chosen as the official speaker among all the graduates of the first period of 1979 at UFPI.

### Document collection

In the "Nursing at UFPI" setting, historical documents related to nursing at this higher education institution and in the state of Piauí are on display. Thus, MEUFPI holds the first book of minutes of the Center of Health Sciences, which portrays the creation of this center at UFPI in 1973, composed, at the time, of the courses of medicine, dentistry and nursing.

Another significant document that makes up the documentary collection refers to the first book of minutes of ABEn of Piauí section (ABEn/PI), as it is the first nursing association in the state, created by Sister Vicentina Abrahíde Alvarenga on March 22, 1959.



**Figure 3.** *Universidade Federal do Piauí* Nursing Museum settings with collection on display. Teresina, Piauí, Brazil, 2023. Source: MEUFPI, 2023.

There is also a copy of the report by the *Escola Maria Antoinette Blanchot* management, covering the period 1958-1978, entitled “*Na memória uma lembrança*”. It is worth noting that this high school, created on June 28, 1958, was the first nursing education institution in the state of Piauí.

There are also three printed volumes of REUFPI for 2012, 2013 and 2014. Although REUFPI is currently an electronic journal, these first three volumes were printed.

### Iconographic collection

The image collection is distributed throughout all MEUFPI settings. Thus, there are replicas of photographs, documents, engravings and drawings arranged from the first setting, “Nursing Pioneers”, to the last, “Nursing of the Future”. All the iconography was selected, classified and organized by setting, with descriptions inserted in spreadsheets, digitized in full, and it is possible to access these sources electronically.

### Journalistic collection

In the “Nursing in Piauí” and “Nursing at UFPI” settings, there are images from the journalistic collection of different newspapers, such as “*O Dominica*”, a Catholic-oriented weekly whose report is related to the creation of the *Escola Maria Antoinette Blanchot*. There is also a report in the newspaper “*O Dia*”, from Teresina, about controversial facts related to the initial functioning and inadequate conditions of the UFPI nursing course. There are also news articles about local nursing figures, such as Professor Benevina Maria Vilar Teixeira Nunes and nurse Maria Otávia Poti, published in the “*Jornal da Cidade*”, from the municipality of Campo Maior, and in the newspaper “*O Dia*”, respectively.

### Historical nursing work collection

In the “Nursing at UFPI” setting, there are historical works on nursing at the international and national levels. A rare international work that is available in the collection, in its original language, is the book “Notes on Nursing”, written by Florence Nightingale in 1859.

At the national level, there are several publications by ABEn, such as the book “*Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem: ABEn 1926-1976 (Documentário)*”, by Anayde Correa de Carvalho. There are also several copies of the *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* and the ABEn Newsletter.

The aforementioned setting also has copies of the book “*História da Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem: Seção Piauí*”, a work that provided a historical overview of the 50 years of ABEn Piauí, as well as a CD of the Proceedings of the 60<sup>th</sup> National Seminar on Guidelines for Nursing Education, held in Teresina in 2002.

### Institutional and biographical object collection

In the “Nursing at UFPI” setting, objects such as the replica of the lamp used by Florence during the vigils at the Crimean hospital as well as other objects are kept. Among the biographical objects, the files on nursing procedures prepared at the *Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery* and a brooch from that school are worthy of note.

### Nursing and healthcare object collection

In the “Nursing in Hospitals” setting, there is a nursing and healthcare object collection that demonstrate their use by nurses at different times in nursing history.

In the last setting, “Nursing of the Future”, equipment and materials used by nurses today are on display, representing new health technologies that are increasingly surprising and practical, essential for the development of nurses’ activities in different specialties.

After overcoming the challenges, MEUFPI was inaugurated on September 29, 2023, during a ceremony that celebrated not only the 50-year trajectory of the UFPI nursing course, but also the legacy of nursing in the state of Piauí and in Brazil. The experience of creating MEUFPI highlights the importance of careful planning, the need for strategic partnerships, and the involvement of the academic and professional community for the success of a museum project. This process of creation and implementation offers a model that can inspire and guide the creation of other museum spaces dedicated to preserving the memory of professions and areas of knowledge.

It is worth noting that the description of this result seeks not only to report the experience lived, but also to serve as a practical contribution to other initiatives that aim to create museum spaces aimed at preserving nursing memory and history as well as other professional areas.

## DISCUSSION

The efforts made to create MEUFPI are based on the understanding of its importance for society and for professional training in nursing, in order to contribute to strengthen historical processes and understanding the constructive process of nursing.<sup>7</sup>

The uniforms are a prominent collection at MEUFPI, and they allow us to see that the uniforms, as they are garments designed for a specific category, identify the person wearing them as belonging to a group or institution. Thus, by characterizing the wearer, they function as a disciplinary object and standardize the attitudes and behaviors of those who wear them. With this, it can be deduced that nurses’ uniforms highlight their qualities, building their social image.<sup>7</sup>

In the evolution of nursing care, the religious style of nurses’ uniforms remained similar to that of nuns, until Florence Nightingale founded the Nightingale School of Nursing at St. Thomas’ Hospital in London in 1860, when recommendations regarding uniforms were established.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Florence was already pointing out and drawing England’s attention to the importance of hygiene as one of the basic principles that is sometimes ignored in everyday life, but is nevertheless fundamental. This fact later served as an example for the world.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the national character’s attire, the artist portrayed the person being honored in his work as a true warrior, who exposes herself to the dangers of work, just as many health professionals do today, especially in difficult times.<sup>10</sup> The color of the clothing

was changed, adapting it to the colors of the museum, relating it to the current color green, used in nursing.

The uniform worn by Maria Otávia Poti demonstrates the symbolic meaning that the *Escola Anna Nery* uniform represented for former students, related to the image of the nurse and her professional identity, by characterizing exemplary conduct. The same value was also applied to the insignia, an essential part of the uniform, according to these professionals.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the documentary collection, the analysis of the first book of minutes of the Health Sciences Center leads us to agree with arguments put forward at the time that informed that the nursing course was inserted in UFPI with the main objective of making the constitution of this center viable.<sup>5</sup>

The report on the 20 years of operation of the *Escola Maria Antoinette Blanchot* highlights the work developed by Sister Vicentina Abrahide Alvarenga, in Piauí, which provided the development of a significant contingent of nursing assistants who provided services in various health institutions in the state of Piauí as well as in neighboring states.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the documents existing in MEUFPI have historical value, represent sources for research in nursing history and allow analysis with interpretations of the representations of each period.<sup>12</sup>

The exhibition of printed volumes of REUFPI is a way of recognizing the importance of this journal in the context of UFPI. It is an online periodical, edited by the Graduate Program in Nursing, whose first edition was published in 2012, and, in the last assessment of the graduate program, developed by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (In Portuguese, *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* - CAPES), for the four-year period 2017/2020, reached Qualis B1, and since 2019, it has been among the 50 most cited journals in Latin America according to the *Cuiden Citación* Ranking.<sup>13</sup>

The iconographic collection present in MEUFPI settings shows that the museum is an important educational resource about nursing contributions, as it is a repository where people place invaluable memories, offering a fascinating view of the past and present of nursing.<sup>14</sup> It is a place that offers nurses the opportunity to see that they participate in an honorable profession.<sup>15</sup>

In relation to the journalistic collection, the materiality of historical sources will, in the future, enable the understanding of the past and may help researchers to understand the lived experience, especially problems and dilemmas of nursing.<sup>16</sup>

The institutional and biographical object collection contains personal objects and art donated by the Department of Nursing professors and nurses who demonstrate their dedication and love for nursing. It is believed that sharing museum spaces with nursing students, nurses and the scientific community interested in the existence and preservation of these places could contribute to awakening ethical awareness of their recent past, which is necessary for preserving nursing memory and identity.<sup>17</sup>

The collection of nursing and healthcare objects on display at MEUFPI allows new generations of nurses to glimpse what

care was like and how it occurred, what technologies were used, and thus expand conceptions of care.<sup>4</sup>

The creation of MEUFPI represents a space for rescue, resistance and contemplation. It is a space for rescue, due to the importance of documenting and transforming the space into an environment of memory. It is a space for resistance, due to the very condition in the health area. And it is a space for contemplation, due to the past that tells the story that results in current nursing, but also of a future in which nurses will be more valued professionals.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This experience report describes the creation of MEUFPI, from its conception to its opening for visits by the university community and society in general. It is believed that the place contributes to the preservation of nursing memory, as it is a space for exhibition, research and ongoing training that allows reconstructing nursing identity and history.

The experience contributed to expanding and disseminating knowledge about successful initiatives within the scope of training spaces for nursing professionals, especially with regard to the appreciation of nursing history.

As a limitation of this study, we pointed out the erasure of the memory of the degree conferral ceremony, such as Professor Benevina Maria Vilar Teixeira Nunes's speech, given at the graduation ceremony of the first-year students of UFPI in 1979, which was not located.

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