Pain as the fifth vital sign

Since 2000, the term Pain: the fifth vital sign has been widely spread by the world aiming to assess and register the pain concomitantly with other vital signs as pulse, blood pressure, core temperature and respiration.

The inclusion criterion for pain as the fifth vital sign is based on the fact that measurement of vital signs is standardized in all health institutions, taking part in the daily life of physicians and nurses who take care of patients at the different levels of health assistance. Consequently, pain must be seriously assessed and treated as any other variation of normality of the vital signs.

Pain surveillance as the 5th vital sign makes it recognized not only as a symptom but as an alert sign. It generates a change of the health multiprofessional staff’s role as well as the health organization which established the pain as a sign demanding a cure pattern and as an indicator of quality of the given assistance.

We, the nurses, we all know how much pain is present in our daily life. Many times we call into question if we are doing our best for the patient but is it the best way to treat his/her pain? How many times we assess the patient by his/her pain? How many times we make the decision to treat or not the patient when in the medical prescription we find the term – if needed? These types of questions have been encouraging the search of more effective actions to deal with the patient with pain.

Care with chronic or acute pain is directly related with the establishment of protocols of evaluation for pain management, as well as the acquisition of knowledge and the nurse’s staff training. There is still a long way to walk but we can already observe a movement towards a curricular implementation of this matter in the nursing graduating and post graduating courses as it has been observed a greater participation of the nurses into the multiprofessional staff who directly acts on this symptom.

El dolor como la quinta señal vital

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