

Nursing advocacy: defending neonates, children, and adolescents in contemporary care

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The work of defending the rights of neonates, children, adolescents, and their families does not end—it only intensifies amid contemporary challenges.

In contemporary nursing care, the scientific understanding of the importance of protecting neonates, children, and adolescents is indisputable. This recognition stems from historical achievements that have enabled the acknowledgment of this population as rights-holders. Brazil's 1988 Federal Constitution, the 1990 Statute of the Child and Adolescent, and the 1995 Resolution on the Rights of Hospitalized Children represent national regulatory milestones that transformed perspectives on childhood. In the following years, new initiatives sought to strengthen these guarantees and introduced emerging issues to the protection agenda, such as the Early Childhood Law (2016), the *Protege Brasil* Program (2022), and the recognition of positive parenting and play as fundamental strategies for violence prevention (2024). Despite these advances, numerous challenges remain in translating these achievements into clinical practice, requiring ongoing efforts to ensure their implementation.

Within this context, the concept of health advocacy emerges, understood as a set of ethical, social, economic, educational, and political strategies aimed at defending and protecting rights. These actions aim to strengthen leadership and public policies, resulting in care that respects neonates, children, and adolescents, and that prioritize their needs. Health advocacy can occur at various levels: individual, through actions targeting specific populations; community, by impacting collective settings; organizational, by promoting administrative changes; and governmental, by contributing to the development of legislation and public policies.⁽¹⁻³⁾ Healthcare professionals' involvement in this field is vital to advancing contemporary care.

Contemporary nursing stands out as a discipline that has been consolidating not only as a science but also as a profession committed to human rights promotion and protection through care focused on health promotion, prevention, treatment, and recovery. This field has a longstanding history of involvement in

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the defense of rights and, when it comes to neonates, children, adolescents, and their families, nursing plays a key role in addressing past violations by fostering a more attentive and rights-based approach in the present—aiming toward the construction of a more just future.

In this context, the Society of Pediatric Nurses recognizes advocacy as an essential competency for nurses who care for neonates, children, and adolescents at the international level.⁽⁴⁾ Similarly, the *Sociedade Brasileira de Enfermeiros Pediatras* (SOBEP), within practical, ethical, and legal domains, also affirms that nurses working in neonatology and pediatrics are competent to advocate for and uphold the rights of this population and their families.⁽⁵⁾ Advocacy, as a professional competency, must be strengthened in the current landscape. This editorial serves as a call to action for nurses to actively engage with the social, technological, cultural, and environmental challenges that affect the care of neonates, children, adolescents, and their families.

In neonatology, numerous challenges impact nursing care, including the rising number of premature births and neonates with genetic syndromes, alongside technological advancements that ensure their survival. Dilemmas persist regarding breastfeeding promotion, protection, and support, vaccine-preventable disease prevention, and symptom management.⁽⁶⁾ In pediatrics, children's growth and development have been increasingly challenged by limited access to health-care services and care networks, the effects of natural disasters, ultra-processed food consumption, excessive screen time, neglect and violence, lack of inclusion in care, and the epidemiological transition marked by a rise in disabilities and chronic and complex conditions.⁽⁷⁾ Furthermore, these challenges are heightened in adolescent care, significantly impacting mental health and the transition to adulthood.⁽⁸⁾ Notably, these issues have been acknowledged by national public policies and identified in the literature as research priorities for this decade.⁽⁹⁾

Thus, there is a call for further progress in defending this population's rights through the implementation of actions that protect them and reduce the impacts they experience. An important advocacy strategy available to nurses is scientific research,⁽¹⁰⁾ which mobilizes both researchers and research consumers to engage in efforts committed to the defense of rights and the pursuit of improved care. Studies that identify, describe, understand, analyze, and map the challenges in translating rights into practice—as well as those that test and/or implement protective and care-focused interventions for neonates, children, and adolescents—are essential to strengthening the quality of discussions on nursing advocacy.

In this regard, the SOBEP Journal has consistently committed to advancing the goals of this society of specialists, particularly protecting and defending children's rights and promoting the technical, scientific, and cultural development of Brazilian neonatal and pediatric nursing. Notably, the 2024 edition featured articles dedicated to breastfeeding advocacy, opposition to the use of artificial nipples and pacifiers, and recognition of breastfeeding as a non-pharmacological intervention for pain relief. Other topics comprised the inclusion of children in care through health literacy, the strengthening of well-child visits as a strategy to promote child development amid the adversities caused by natural disasters and global public health emergencies, the inclusion of families in child care, among others, demonstrating alignment with emerging challenges in nursing care.

Building on these advances, in 2025, the SOBEP Journal and its editorial board are opening space for the publication of studies related to *Nursing Advocacy—Defending Neonates, Children, and Adolescents in Contemporary Care*. We seek articles with powerful narratives about rights achievements or violations that can strengthen public policies, inspire professionals, reshape clinical practice, and enhance the visibility of childhood, rights, and advocacy as an ethical commitment and professional duty. Through this editorial, we invite everyone to submit their work for our special issue.

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