

Historical documentation of the Santa Casa de Diamantina – MG: content and state of conservation

Documentação histórica da Santa Casa de Diamantina – MG: conteúdo e estado de conservação

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the historical documents found in the archives greatly contribute to the preservation of the historic memory and production of knowledge. **Objective:** to describe the historical documentation in the health area of the Santa Casa in the municipality of Diamantina, Minas Gerais, in relation to content and state of conservation. **Methods:** this was a descriptive study, historical and social, conducted in the archives of the Santa Casa de Diamantina – MG. Upon permission granted by the hospital in study, the examination of the documentation proceeded between March and August of 2013. The founding memo record dated of 1790 and the patients' registration books for the years 1875 and 1904 were analyzed. **Results:** the content related to the foundation of the hospital and its poor conservation stood out in relation to the documentation from 1790. In the documentation from 1875, showing good condition, the type of patients' registration including color, temperament, condition, diagnosis, and treatment stood out. The documentation for the year of 1904 is extremely well preserved and refers to data such as marital status and disease in addition to those registered in 1875. **Conclusion:** the content of this documentation is of historical interest to the health sector, and needs restoration.

Key words: History of Medicine; Hospitals/history; Documentation; Hospital Records.

RESUMO

Introdução: os documentos históricos encontrados nos arquivos contribuem sobremaneira para a preservação da memória histórica e para a produção de conhecimentos. **Objetivo:** descrever a documentação histórica da área da saúde da Santa Casa do município de Diamantina-MG, em relação ao conteúdo e estado de conservação. **Métodos:** trata-se de estudo descritivo, histórico-social, realizado no arquivo da Santa Casa de Diamantina-MG. Após autorização do hospital em estudo, procedeu-se à análise da documentação, no período de março a agosto de 2013. Analisou-se a ata da fundação, datada de 1790, e os livros de registro de pacientes nos anos de 1875 e 1904. **Resultados:** destacou-se, em relação à documentação da ata de 1790, o conteúdo que diz respeito à fundação da instituição hospitalar e sua má-conservação. Quanto à documentação referente a 1875, destacou-se o tipo de registro dos pacientes, incluindo cor, temperamento, condição, diagnóstico e tratamento, apresentando bom estado de conservação. A documentação do ano de 1904 refere dados como estado civil e moléstias, além daqueles registrados em 1875, e apresenta-se extremamente bem conservada. **Conclusão:** o conteúdo dessa documentação é de interesse histórico para a área da saúde e necessita de restauração.

Palavras-chave: História da Medicina; Hospitais/história; Documentação; Registros Hospitalares.

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INTRODUCTION

Archives as a specific location to store and protect documents originated in the ancient Greek civilization. In the V and IV centuries BC, the Athenians stored documents by the court of justice in the Athens public square where they kept treaties, laws, minutes of popular assemblies, and other official documents. Such documents, preserved since primitive times until the third century of the Christian Era, transmitted information and knowledge from that civilization to the current.¹

According to the same author, the careful conservation of documents takes place from antiquity and is reaffirmed in the Middle Ages. The first interested in archives emerged in the Renaissance period; however, there was a concern with ordering and preservation methods. This fact is of accentuated gravity because archives hold documents that were accumulated organically and produced naturally in the course of the execution of functions and activities performed by entities or persons, regardless of the nature or supporting information, which are characterized by its uniqueness. In addition to a recipient organ, it can also be defined as the entity or administrative authority responsible for the custody, documentary treatment, and use of files under their jurisdiction. Therefore, it is necessary to follow general principles and be based on the specific trajectory of each entity or person, which requires knowledge of the relationship between documents and the entity's structure.

It is worth mentioning that the information contained in documents deposited in archives are of paramount importance not only for society but also for organizations that have these repositories in which the documentary content becomes a remarkable heritage for the history of any institution. On the assumption that the archival heritage is a legacy of man throughout his history, there is necessarily a need to reinforce its importance in institutions that preserve this heritage. Thus, the archive needs to be understood as a place of memory for the preservation of documents that has a valued character in the context of each institution.²

Therefore, the binomial archive-information reflects the relationships of interdependence between an institution and its cultural functions as well as it positions this institution at the center of society, which is characterized by many as an information society possessing a crucial role regarding the social, cultural, science, and technology development.³

It should be noted that the information contained in archival documents will significantly contribute to

the construction of memory in each institution, emphasizing the importance of document preservation. Thus, the primary function of archives is not just as the guardian of documentary heritage but also of dissemination of information that is under their responsibility.

Therefore, archives greatly contribute to the preservation of the historic memory and production of knowledge. The same occurs in the field of health in which archives are projected as fundamental spaces for the production and preservation of knowledge.

In this field, it is worth noting that the first Santa Casas was founded to tend to poor patients and soldiers in Brazil in 1543, in the main Brazilian hereditary captaincies. By that time, health care was conducted by healers, midwives, and scarce doctors, initially Portuguese doctors and subsequently Brazilian doctors graduated in Portugal. The first formal experiences of teaching the art of healing were through 'regia' classes (formal classes).⁴ However, in the XVIII century, on the account of a strong Christian motivation, individuals moved by charity, protection, and assistance to the sick performed laymen practices detached from scientific knowledge.⁵

At the beginning of the XX century, the growth and transformation in the Santa Casas archive accompanied the urban development and changes, deepening the social and cultural meanings of mercy, which was basically of recoiling, and gradually assuming the therapeutic role. Therefore, Medicine began to have a more expressive role. The use of the hospital as a school to prepare students from the Medical School led new technologies to be adopted and research to become a modifying element towards the hospital conditions.⁶

Records that are period-specific to this study referring to the town in which it was developed were not found in the literature. Therefore, the analysis of the historical documentation found in the Santa Casa's archives is appropriate because it was a prominent hospital in this town, which since the XVIII century assisted its population and that of a macro-region.

Hence, the objective of this study was to describe the historical documentation of Santa Casa in the health field in the municipality of Diamantina-MG in relation to its content and state of conservation.

METHODS

This study has a descriptive and historical-social approach, whose data were collected in the Santa

Casa of Diamantina. The institution was founded on May 23, 1790, based on a philanthropic and non-profit character, receiving approximately 95% of resources from the Unified Health System. Its purpose is social assistance to needy individuals. Over 223 years, it has adapted to political and assistential transformations in Brazil, consolidating itself as the regional reference of medium and high complexity, providing assistance in the municipality and another 30 municipalities in the Vale do Jequitinhonha, Minas Gerais.

A visit to the institution's archive to examine the documentation concerned with this study was conducted after authorization granted by the hospital director. This study was not submitted to the Ethics Committee in Research because it is a documentary research that aimed to analyze documents of historical interest to the health sector, in period of the XVIII, XIX, and XX centuries, and it did not involve humans. Patients' names were not cited or identified.

The research was conducted at the archive site, between March and August of 2013, because the material should be kept onsite for the purpose of protection.

Five books from the period 1781 to 1798, eight from 1832 to 1897, and four from 1901 to 1911 are part of the collection. The content refers to the registry of patients, documents from the administrative board, expense reports, prescriptions, proceedings, and accounting books.

Due to issues related to technical difficulties in relation to the reading material, we decided first to analyze those in which the conservation status would facilitate the analysis and those with content related to healthcare.

Therefore, the documentation related to the minutes of the Santa Casa foundation (1790), the log book of patients in the period of 1875, and finally the patients' registration book from 1904 were examined.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Initially, Figure 1 reports the documentation dated of May 1790 containing data related to the Santa Casa foundation.

The content follows:

In this year, on May 23rd, the day of the Holy Spirit, this hospital was erected by the devoted hermit Manoel de Jesus Fortes; being the governor of these mines your Excellency Visconde de Barbacena, and intendand of the diamonds in this Tejuco, judge Mr. Luís Beltrão, and Mr. João Inacio do Amaral Silveira being the inspector. It

was erected in two houses purchased from captain Manoel Lopes de Souza, for three and a half thousand cruzados, paid equally by Mr. Carlos da Silva de Oliveira and captain Manoel Roiz de Carvalho who freely gave to Manoel de Jesus Fortes to found it, who named as landlord Mr. Manoel Lopes Duarte who with goodwill performed the role of a good attorney. Manoel de Jesus Fortes.

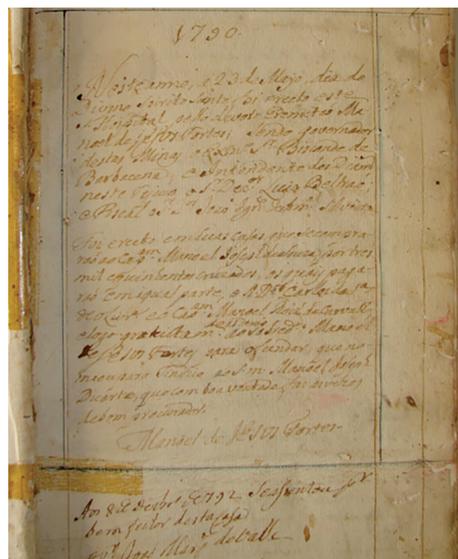


Figure 1 - Minutes of the Santa Casa of Diamantina foundation. Diamantina – MG, 2013.

Source: Archive of Santa Casa of Diamantina. Diamantina – MG, 2013

Several abbreviations were identified in the transcribed excerpt. In a study found⁷ in the literature, it is cited that the reading of the old documentation is arduous; however, there are rules that really facilitate the reading. It is also stressed that it is essential to know the abbreviations that are common of each time, which facilitated the transcription of items that compose this work.

In relation to the state of conservation, the material presents several holes caused by powderpost beetles, tape stains, and a small bluish spot at the bottom of the page, appearing to be stamping ink. It is noted that the ink is lightly faded and that probably pen and ink were used in the writing due to small darkened spots at the edges of some letters. As for the paper, it seems heavier than that in the other reviewed books, where darkened tape marks, placed in an attempt to fix the spine, are observed.

The books feature small holes caused by beetles (brocas) and the presence of these insects is still noticed in some of the pages. The pages are stained

by fungi and bacteria and frayed at the ends due to the action of dust over the years and lack of care in their handling.

At the beginning of the study, the found material was stored in wooden bookshelves, which facilitates the accumulation of dust and attracts insects. Subsequently, it was transferred to another archive, stored in steel shelving, thus contributing to its conservation. It is worth noting that the above material needs urgent restoration to be preserved for longer periods.

In relation to the period of 1875, Figures 2 and 3 intend to ease the understanding of how the registration was conducted, and its visualization.

Figures 2 and 3 show the records for names, color, age, temperament, constitution, condition, entry, death, exit, diagnosis, treatment, and observations. It is worth noting that 188 patients were assisted in the year 1875; in complying with ethical issues, their names were not published.

The image shows a handwritten medical registry table for the year 1875. The table has several columns with headers: 'Nome' (Name), 'Cor' (Color), 'Idade' (Age), 'Temperamento' (Temperament), 'Constituição' (Constitution), 'Condição' (Condition), 'Entrada' (Entry), and 'Saída' (Exit). The entries are handwritten in cursive script, listing patient details for each day of the year.

Figure 2 - Registry of patients from the year 1875 referring to name, color, age, temperament, constitution, condition, and entry and exit dates. Diamantina – MG, 2013. Source: Archive of Santa Casa of Diamantina. Diamantina – MG, 2013.

There is a quantitative growth of patients when compared to the year 1867 in which 64 patients were registered.⁸

In regards to skin color, the records show “brown, black, and white”. The ages ranged between 12 and 86 years, with an average of 42 years. As for tempera-

ment, the following records are shown: “sympathetic, sanguine, aggressive, doubtful, dubious, bilious, nervous, and mixed”. Constitution was recorded as: “weak, strong, and regular.” The condition was divided into “slave, freedman, and free”.

The image shows a handwritten medical registry table for the year 1875. The table has several columns with headers: 'Nome' (Name), 'Cor' (Color), 'Idade' (Age), 'Temperamento' (Temperament), 'Constituição' (Constitution), 'Condição' (Condition), 'Entrada' (Entry), and 'Observações' (Observations). The entries are handwritten in cursive script, listing patient details and their medical observations for each day of the year.

Figure 3 - Registry of patients from the year 1875 referring to death, entry and exit dates, diagnosis, treatment, and observations. Diamantina – MG, 2013. Source: Archive of Santa Casa de Diamantina. Diamantina – MG, 2013.

It is highlighted that the classification of patients was based on data relating to the ethnicity characterization, without this space in current records of patients, and that despite that those assistance practices were outdated in relation to the current ones, individuals with advanced age were observed, especially for that time in which life expectancy did not outshine 35 years.⁹ It should also be noted that personality characteristics were recorded in addition to the physical conditions. This fact can be related to the criteria used for segregation and patient safety measures in force at the time in the wards, grouped by diseases or similar characteristics. This was because a high number of patients admitted during this period was of slaves, whom mostly needed constant assistance due to overloaded work practices.¹⁰

The columns concerning entry and exit register dates thereof. Among these two columns, cases of deaths occurring between these dates were recorded. The next columns regarded diagnoses and treatments. Table 1 lists some of these items.

The spelling and obsolete terms that are not part of the current language such as “ Arthritis - Antiphlogistic sweating” “Meningitis - Antophil, vomiting and

bleeding”; the use of alcoholic beverages for the treatment of illnesses such as “Cachexia senile - Tonics, wine”, “Rheumatism-Lanville Liqueur, and Potassium Iodide”; erroneous practices in treating “Brain congestion - Diuretics and bloodletting”, “Syphilis - Mercury, potassium iodide, and mercury lubricants”, in addition to diagnoses that do not constitute diseases such as “Nervousness – Brumont”, “Old age – Many and numerous medicines.” Although some treatments are still used to control diseases, in a reduced quantitative, for example, “Mitral deficiency - Digitalin”, it is relevant to emphasize that diagnoses and treatments were described as cited in the archive files preserving the spelling of the studied period.

Table 1 - Distribution of diagnostics and treatment are registered in 1875. Diamantina – MG, 2013

Diagnoses	Treatments
Aneurysm	Femoral artery ligation
Arthritis	Antiphlogistic sweating
Senile cachexia	Tonics, wine, etc
Cerebral congestion	Diuretics and bloodletting
Venereal cancer	Purgative, cauterization with silver nitrate
Delirium tremens	Opium
Dysentery	Tonics and bismuth
Dyspepsia	“Pepsimão”
Gastric distress	Cathartic emethan, carbometane purgative, and purgatives
Swamp fever	Cathartic emethan
Foot gangrene	Amputation
Gastritis	Bitter tonics
Hepatitis	Soap pill, jurubeba, and tonics
Herpes	Sulphide
Peritoneum inflammation	Anti-putrid and dilation
Mitral insufficiency	Digitalis
Invalid	Tonics and tranquilizers
Heart injury	Diuretics, Duprey pill, and Digitalis
Illness	Sweat induced vomiting
Meningitis	Antophil, vomiting, and bloodletting
Albuminous nephritis	Tonicos, milk (milk diet)
Nervousness	Brumont
Rheumatism	Lanville liqueur and potassium iodide
Mitral stenosis	Digitalis
Syphilis	Mercury, potassium iodide, and mercury lubricants
Tênia solium	“Teshantina”
Úlcera syphelítica	Cleansers
Velhice	Many and numerous medicines

Source: Archive of Santa Casa of Diamantina. Diamantina – MG, 2013.

This study presents itself in agreement with another found in literature¹¹, which states that the registration of cases, in one type of medical chart, was a decisive factor for the therapeutic implemented follow up. Memos, notes resulting from evaluations, and prescriptions of medicines were found in these records.

The recorded observations show: “Was discharged upon request”, “Entered almost moribund”, “Pensioner of Captain João Felício”, “With senile cachexia” “Passed way upon leaving”, “Left in good condition”, “Arrived moribund” and “Ran away from the infirmary”, “Amputation carried out and conserved as an invalid”, “Untreatable canker, arrived moribund and died in a few hours” and “With vulgar leprosy, ran away from the hospital”.

We highlight the terms used to classify the state of health such as “moribund”, “invalid”, as well as the frequent reports of escape from the hospital. These facts refer to a relevant situation because the largest number of sick served in the institution was slaves who did not possess the conditions to return to their laboring activities, losing their work and concomitantly their condition of sustenance, and thus escaping was their only option.

Such documentation is presented in good conservation condition, with some wear at the extremities caused by dust and some holes caused by beetles, not hindering the content reading. This material needs restoration by gluing and cleaning of the documents.

Figure 4 displays the registry of patients in 1904, which allowed taking names (not published due to ethical issues), age, place of birth, color, marital status, date of entry and exit, disease, and observations. The age ranged between 21 and 82 years, with an average of 51 years, age above that cited in the analysis for the year 1875.

One item inserted in this record is related to naturalness, from which it can be noted that, already at that time, the institution assisted patients from the municipality and the surrounding regions such as Rio Preto, Gouveia, and Mendanha.

Color is also part of the registry shown as “white, black, and brown”.

The category “State” was inserted, in reference to the marital status of patients and registering the following designations: “married, widowed, and single”.

In the two subsequent columns, dates of hospital entry and exit were recorded. Here, another change was registered when compared to the year 1878 because in that period there was one column for deaths.

During this period, deaths were recorded in the column referring to comments.

Figure 4 - Registry of patients from the year 1904 regarding name, age, birthplace, color, marital status, entry and exit dates, disease, and observations. Diamantina – MG, 2013
 Source: Archive of Santa Casa de Diamantina. Diamantina – MG, 2013.

The term “Diagnosis” used during the period of 1878 has been changed to “Disease”, emphasizing that this field was not filled for many patients during this period. However, there is one record: “Cancerous”. Contrary to what was observed in the documents pertaining to 1875, the practice of incomplete registry was already held, making it difficult to understand the main diseases occurring in the period, as well as potentiating possible errors of conduct and treatment due to lack of diagnosis.

These notes do not show the treatment received by the patient just as in the period of 1875. Data regarding temperament, constitution, and condition were also absent. The absence of the last record is justified because after 1889 there were no slaves in Brazil.

The documentation of this period is extremely well preserved, requiring only cleaning and correct conditioning for the so-called preventive conservation.¹²

It is still worth pointing out that the action of external agents such as physical, chemical, and biological such as inappropriate temperature and relative humidity, insects, microorganisms and actions of man is due to storage and use conditions. As for internal agents, they are directly related to paper composition such as type of fibers, sizing, chemical residues, and metallic particles. The paper fibers in the book from 1790 are thicker than those in the other analyzed books.

On the approach of hygiene, failure to keep shelves and books clean leads to content deterioration because dust damages the aesthetic and information contained in the document causing abrasive and catalyst effects, biological contamination, and pages surface and corner wear, the called sanding effect.¹³

In Brazil, until the beginning of the XX century, healthcare was performed by religious members of the Santa Casas. It possessed a charitable connotation assisting those in miserable conditions. The activities were aimed at cleaning the hospital environment, discipline, organization of workers, and physical and spiritual state of patients.^{14,15}

In this scenario, such activities also took place in the Santa Casa that is the focus of the present study. However, there is no evidence of a specific record of health professionals in the reviewed documentation. No records of doctors, nurses or pharmacists were found, as well as their names, functions, or educational institutions.

Another study investigating about such lack of records states that “even in the XIX century, the Santa Casa of Diamantina did not hire doctors but received visits of worthy and charitable gentlemen who were resident physicians in this town”.¹⁶

In another study¹⁷, there is reference to documentation of a registry proving that in another hospital in the municipality of Diamantina, in the year 1901, “the following professionals were hired: a Provider, a Chaplain, a Physician, a Pharmacist, a Nurse, an Administrator, and a Doorman”.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of this study, the historical documentation of important interest to the health sector in general is described, from which the content about historical aspects pertaining to the foundation of the Santa Casa of Diamantina, an institution of secular importance in the region, were verified. The content relate to alms, date, and responsible individuals for its foundation and, above all, patient registration techniques in the past centuries with emphasis on relevant items of interest such as the importance of registration of patient’s color and condition, diagnoses and treatments, some of them quite similar to those in the current time, and lack of records about health professionals in the documentation reviewed.

In addition, the verification of the state of documentation conservation highlighted the necessity of resto-

ration and conservation. This measure is expected to protect this material in the future, which could continue to witness important aspects of general health history in the municipality of Diamantina, considered an important historical city, as well as the Santa Casas, which are pioneering health care institutions in Brazil.

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