

# The official masters degree in emergency and critical care nursing

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None

**Background and objective:** The academic configuration of the European Higher Education Area establishes a second cycle of study, referred to as an official masters degree, as part of postgraduate training. Our aim was to identify opportunities this academic pathway represents for advanced training in emergency and critical care nursing.

**Methods:** We identified official university postgraduate training programs listed by the Secretary General of the University Coordination Council, and classified them by orientation after determining the program names and the nursing roles addressed in the syllabus (patient care, teaching, research, and administration).

**Results:** We identified 6 official masters degrees requiring either 60 or 120 credits according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The study requirements included in the syllabi addressed the nursing roles of care, research and administration. The programs had orientations that were academic, mixed, or professional.

**Conclusions:** An official masters degree program offers advanced training in emergency and critical care nursing and can incorporate the possibility of continuing on to do a doctorate in order to become an independent researcher and move our specialty forward. Official masters degrees of 120 ECTS credits offer a more complete level of training and give direct access to doctoral studies; they take a mixed approach. Degree programs of 60 ECTS offer further training with a professional or academic orientation. [Emergencias 2009;21:283-286]

**Key words:** European Higher Education Area Emergency nursing Critical care nursing. Nursing specialties. Masters degree.

## Introduction

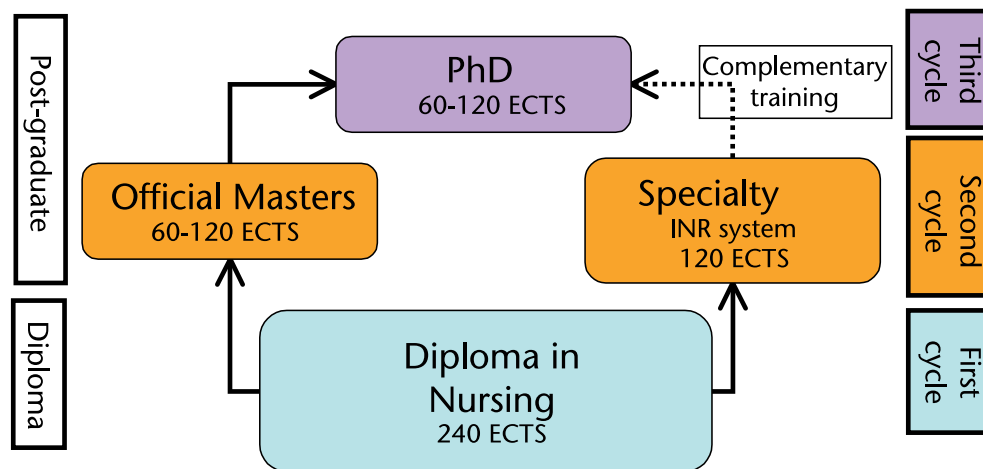
The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is structured into three levels, including undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The first cycle leads to undergraduate degrees. In the case of Nursing, the Diploma in Nursing requires 240 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) spread over four academic years. Post graduate studies comprise the second and third cycles, leading to the Master's and Doctoral degrees<sup>1,2</sup> (Figure 1).

The Masters comprises between 60 and 120 ECTS, a high-level training, with four possible orientations: (1) professional, geared toward training

for professional practice, (2) investigator, focused on research activities aimed at the doctoral degree; (3) academic, which combines training for professional practice and introduction to research, and (4) mixed, with more than one orientation.

The title of PhD, for researcher training, will be awarded to a student whose doctoral thesis has passed after the PhD Program consisting of 60 ECTS.

As an alternative to the Masters, there are Specialties, with an Internal Nursing Resident system (INR). The specialty Medical-Surgical Nursing includes the field of Emergency and Critical Care Nursing, which so far lacks its own specialty<sup>3</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Structural map of the European Higher Education Area. ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. INR: Internal Nursing Resident.

The Official Master's and the Specialty options are projected in parallel. Thus, students in different fields of knowledge can receive advanced training in both options. Emergency and Critical Care Nursing requires a highly specific training. The critical state of the patient, and the different contexts in which care is involved, require advanced training to ensure the acquisition of the necessary training, including knowledge, skills and attitudes: in short, to ensure professional competence. Moreover, Emergency Departments themselves generally require these characteristics and training of their personnel<sup>4</sup>.

Emergency and Critical Care Nursing has spent years fighting for recognition of their specialty. So far, no major achievements have occurred in this respect. Given the restructuring involved in EHEA, while waiting for specialty status, one might ask what opportunities are offered by the Official Masters program in this area.

This paper attempts to answer that question, and seeks to identify and analyzes the training on offer via the Official Masters at Spanish universities.

## Method

Consulting the Secretariat of the Council of University Coordination official list of graduate programs and titles for the academic year 2008-2009 allowed us to identify what is offered in relation to the Official Masters of Emergency and Care Nursing. We then proceeded to analyze the academic requirements (workload) of the various aspects of nursing practice: professional care, teaching, research and management, in order to classify Official Masters according to their orientation.

## Results

There are six Official Masters related to Emergency and Critical Care Nursing in the academic year 2008-2009; they use different terms such as: emergencies, critical patient, anesthesia and intensive care. The academic load is 60-120 ECTS; the two options provided by EHEA are one or two academic years respectively<sup>5</sup> (Table 1).

**Table 1.** List of Official Masters courses in Emergency and Critical Care Nursing. Names of the courses and number of credits. Academic year 2008-2009

University	Province	Name	Credits
University of Málaga	Málaga	Masters in comprehensive nursing care in critical situations and adult emergencies	60 ECTS
Autonomous University of Barcelona	Barcelona	Masters in comprehensive care of critical patients and emergencies	60-120 ECTS
University of Barcelona	Barcelona	Masters in comprehensive care for the critically ill and emergencies	60-120 ECTS
European University of Madrid	Madrid	Masters in emergency and critical patients	60 ECTS
Rey Juan Carlos University	Madrid	Masters in critical care	120 ECTS
University of Murcia	Murcia	Masters in Nursing for anaesthesia and intensive care	60 ECTS

ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

**Table 2.** Allocation of ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) according to role in nursing practice

University	Patient attention	Teaching	Management	Research
University of Málaga	30 ECTS (50%)	0	0	30 ECTS (50%)
Autonomous University of Barcelona	70 ECTS (58,3%)	0	10 ECTS (8,3%)	40 ECTS (33,3%)
University of Barcelona	70 ECTS (58,3%)	0	10 ECTS (8,3%)	40 ECTS (33,3%)
European University of Madrid	30 ECTS (50%)	0	0	30 ECTS (50%)
Rey Juan Carlos University	100 ECTS (83,33%)	0	5 ECTS (4,17%)	15 ECTS (12,5%)
University of Murcia	60 ECTS (100%)	0	0	0

**Table 3.** Classification of Official Masters courses in Emergency and Critical Care Nursing according to orientation. Academic year 2008-2009

University	Course name	Orientation
University of Málaga	Masters in comprehensive nursing care in critical situations and adult emergencies	Academic
Autonomous University of Barcelona	Masters in comprehensive care of critical patients and emergencies	Mixed
University of Barcelona	Masters in comprehensive care for the critically ill and emergencies	Mixed
European University of Madrid	Masters in emergency and critical patients	Academic
Rey Juan Carlos University	Masters in critical care	Mixed
University of Murcia	Masters in Nursing for anaesthesia and intensive care	Professional training

Analysis of their academic schedules showed how credits are assigned according to orientations of professional care, teaching, management and research (Table 2). Classification according to orientation was as follows: one masters course for professional care (University of Murcia, 60 ECTS), two academic (University of Malaga, 60 ECTS, and Universidad Europea de Madrid, 60 ECTS) and three mixed type (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, 120 ECTS, University of Barcelona, 120 ECTS, and Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, 120 ECTS) (Table 3).

The Masters in professional care devotes 100% of ECTS to patient care; in academic orientation 50% of ECTS are for patient care training and 50% for research; and the mixed orientation devotes 67% to healthcare, 26% to research and 7% to management. No ECTS (academic workload) are devoted to the field of teaching.

## Discussion

The Official Masters is an opportunity to advance in the field of Emergency and Critical Care Nursing; it offers specialized training which also leads to the possibility of continuing with the PhD for research autonomy and the advancement of our professional specialty and nursing science<sup>6</sup>.

To acquire skills in patient care, research and management the student must do the Official Masters of 120 ECTS (two academic years) of mixed orientation, which is the most comprehen-

sive option available and which offers direct access to the PhD. Those of 60 ECTS (one year) are for professional care and clinical practice, or for academic orientation which combines care and research.

Thus, the Official Masters program is an advance, as well as an alternative, for Emergency and Critical Care nurses seeking advanced training and specialization with a recognised academic degree in their professional area<sup>7</sup>.

## References

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## La vía Máster Oficial para Enfermería de Urgencias, Emergencias y Cuidados Críticos

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**Objetivo:** El mapa académico del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior establece, dentro de la formación de postgrado, un segundo ciclo, el título de Máster Oficial. Este trabajo busca respuesta a las oportunidades que esta vía académica supone para la formación avanzada en Enfermería de Urgencias, Emergencias y Cuidados Críticos.

**Método:** Se identifica la oferta formativa de programas de postgrado universitario en la publicación del listado de éstos de la Secretaría General del Consejo de Coordinación Universitaria, se determinan las denominaciones y el tipo de carga lectiva (asistencial, docente, investigadora y de gestión) y se clasifican según su orientación.

**Resultados:** Se encuentran 6 Másteres Oficiales, de 60 y 120 ECTS (*European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*), con carga lectiva de tipo asistencial, investigadora y de gestión; con orientaciones académicas, mixtas y profesionalizante.

**Conclusiones:** La vía Máster Oficial supone una formación avanzada en Enfermería de Urgencias, Emergencias y Cuidados Críticos, que implica la posibilidad de continuar con el Doctorado en busca de la autonomía investigadora y el avance de nuestra especialidad profesional. Los Másteres Oficiales de 120 ECTS ofrecen una formación más amplia y con acceso directo al Doctorado, con orientación mixta; y los 60 ECTS una formación profesionalizante o académica. [Emergencias 2009;21:283-286]

**Palabras clave:** Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Enfermería de Urgencias, Emergencias y Cuidados Críticos. Especialidades. Máster Oficial.