

Addressing Ethical Issues in Practice

NZNO Midlands Professional Forum

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Focus of forum

- * Review fundamentals of nursing ethics
- * Discuss categories of ethical issues
- * Recognise ethical dilemmas in practice
- * Discuss how to address ethical dilemmas in practice

Nursing ethics

- * Systematic rules or principles governing right conduct
- * Each practitioner on entering the profession, is invested with the responsibility to adhere to the standards of ethical practice and conduct set by the profession
- * The values or moral principles governing relationships between the nurse and patient, the patient's family, other members of the health professions and the general public

Underlying philosophy

- * Nursing founded on moral premise of caring and the belief that nurses have a commitment to do good.
- * Society's expectations of nurses is that they are moral agents in provision of care and have responsibility to conduct themselves ethically in what they do and how they interact with persons receiving care

Assumptions

- * That relationships and interactions take place in a climate of respect for the other (culture, religion, life choices, sexual orientation, ethnicity etc.)
- * That respect for the individual / group / community encompasses the notion of partnership and collaboration
- * That relationships and interactions seek to achieve an equitable outcome for the individual / group / community

Underlying values

Autonomy

Beneficence

Non Maleficence

Justice

Confidentiality

Veracity

Fidelity

Guardianship of the environment and its resources

Being professional

Self-determination

Doing good

Doing no harm

Fairness

Privacy

Truthfulness

Faithfulness

NZNO Code of Ethics (2010)

Relationships within an ethical framework

- * Nurse – client
- * Nurse – colleague
- * Nurse – organisation
- * Nurse – societal

Ethical dilemmas

Ethical dilemmas arise from situations that involve conflicting values or beliefs about what is the right or best course of action. In such situations, conflict may arise between two or more ethical principles, and each possible solution may contain undesirable outcomes for one or more parties involved

Responding to ethical dilemmas

- * Nurses' reactions to a specific ethical dilemma are based on their individual values and beliefs as well as ethical principles, professional codes, and the climate of the health care setting
- * Nurses must recognise when conflicting values result in ethical questions and moral distress and must actively dialogue to process and resolve the problems

- * How an individual nurse perceives and reacts to a patient care situation is a highly individualised process that depends on the individual's unique set of beliefs and values.
- * What one nurse sees as an ethical conflict may not be seen as troubling by another nurse who is guided by a different set of principles and priorities

Categories of ethical issues

1. **Moral uncertainty-** may be the earliest response and occurs when nurses feel that something is not right or are uncertain about the optimal course of action
2. **Moral or ethical dilemma-** nurses identify that two opposing courses of action can be justified and are unsure about what alternative should be taken
3. **Moral distress-** occurs when nurses know the right course of action but feel powerless to act on the choice because of institutional obstacles or policies, hierarchical power structures, lack of resources, lack of support or legal limits

(Jameton, 1984, 1993)

Moral distress

- * May occur when nurses disagree with a course of action that has been chosen. May experience initial distress when first confronting the situation, followed by reactive distress, which results from the inability to successfully address the obstacles or resolve the conflict
- * Nurses may feel depressed, angry or frustrated by the sense that a situation is wrong or that the right decision has not been made

Ethical issues in practice

- * Primary practice
- * Aged Residential Care
- * Acute hospital services
- * Mental Health and Addictions
- * Hospice
- * Private practice
- * Maori and Pacific providers
- * Rural

Ethical dilemmas faced by nurses

- * Staffing ratios
- * End of life care
- * Quality of life
- * Patients making decisions against recommended treatment
- * Prolonging life
- * Reduced resources, rationing of resources
- * Increased workload/ expectations of organisation
- * Advocating for patients / families
- * Unequal distribution of resources

Addressing ethical dilemmas

- * Need to be able to recognise when ethical values may be compromised or in conflict
- * Need to acknowledge feelings when something 'doesn't feel right' for themselves, their colleagues and initiate discussion about the situations. This will help validate the experiences and clarify responses of uncertainty or distress
- * Climate of workplace needs to support ethical discussion

Factors influencing willingness to respond

1. Nurses' perceptions of their influence in the setting
2. Level of clinical expertise
3. Degree of ethical concern
4. Whether they have had professional education in ethics to be willing to look at issues and develop alternative solutions

Problem solving process

- * Assessing situation
- * Identifying the ethical problem
- * Analysing the problem and begin solving problem
- * Exploring the options
- * Implementing the action
- * Evaluating the process outcome

CLINICAL ISSUES	PATIENT PREFERENCES
<p><i>The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence</i></p> <p>What is the patient's medical history / diagnosis / prognosis?</p> <p>What are the treatment options?</p> <p>What are the goals of treatment?</p> <p>What is the benefit to the patient?</p>	<p><i>The principle of respect for autonomy</i></p> <p>What are the patient's expressed preferences for treatment?</p> <p>Is the patient competent?</p> <p>What would they want done?</p> <p>What is in their best interests?</p>
QUALITY OF LIFE	CONTEXTUAL FEATURES
<p><i>The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence and respect for autonomy</i></p> <p>Prospects of survival with and without treatment?</p> <p>Various effects of treatment on patient?</p> <p>What are the plans for comfort and palliative care?</p>	<p><i>The principles of loyalty and fairness</i></p> <p>How does this affect others: family, whanau and team?</p> <p>Cost to health system?</p> <p>Cultural / religious issues?</p> <p>Law and policy?</p>

Consequences of unresolved conflicts

- * Compromises in patient care
- * Feelings of uncertainty, tension and frustration
- * Job dissatisfaction
- * Disagreements among those in the healthcare team
- * Shortage of staff, resources and economic constraints can be overwhelming
- * Nurses may sacrifice their own moral integrity to survive in current healthcare settings
- * burnout

Opportunities

- * Nurses can make a difference to improve ethical climate of their practice settings
- * Strive for an environment in which feelings of moral uncertainty and distress are recognised and ethical compromises are actively discussed and resolved
- * Be role models for students and novice nurses
- * Dialogue about moral distress in practice with nursing colleagues and other team members