A Process to Manage Challenging Professional/Ethical Issues

Being prepared to address challenging ethical and professional issues with knowledge and identified procedures is the key to ensuring such issues are resolved in a timely and appropriate manner.

What is a Challenging Professional or Ethical Issue?

A challenging professional or ethical issue is encountered when a nurse has concerns about an action or situation and believes there is a need for resolution. The following strategies will assist nurses in preparing to manage challenging ethical and professional issues:

- Create opportunities for discussion and seminars on ethical issues in clinical practice.
- Discuss issues with management and encourage open and honest debate on ethical issues affecting nursing practice and standards of care.
- Familiarise yourself with legislation and institutional policies.
- Lobby to change situations which are potentially incompatible with ethical nursing practice.
- Seek legal advice.
- Hold membership of a professional organisation.

These steps may assist nurses to manage challenging situations:

1. **Assess**

   - Collect facts
   - Reflect and consult with colleagues
   - Record/document facts
   - Discuss with senior staff
   - Generate ideas, develop a plan and implement

   **Situation Resolved?**  No

2. **Consult**

   - Senior nurses/Director of Nursing
   - Other health professionals
   - NZNO workplace delegate
   - NZNO Regional Organiser
   - Te Runanga (NZNO)

   **Situation Resolved?**  No

3. **Report/Communicate**

   - Senior management (with NZNO support if desired)
   - NZNO Professional Nursing Advisor
   - NZNO Legal Advisor

   **Situation Resolved?**  Yes

No further action
### Clinical Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence</th>
<th>The principle of respect for autonomy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What is the patient’s medical history/diagnosis/prognosis?</td>
<td>• What are the patient’s expressed preferences for treatment?</td>
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<td>• What are the treatment options?</td>
<td>• Is the patient competent?</td>
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<td>• What are the goals of treatment?</td>
<td>• What would they want done?</td>
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<td>• What is the benefit to the patient?</td>
<td>• What is in their best interests?</td>
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### Quality of Life

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<tr>
<th>The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence and respect for autonomy</th>
<th>The principles of loyalty and fairness</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Prospects of survival with and without treatment?</td>
<td>• How does this affect others: family whānau and team?</td>
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<td>• Various effects of patient treatment?</td>
<td>• Cost to Central health system?</td>
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<td>• What are the plans for comfort and palliative care?</td>
<td>• Cultural/religious issues?</td>
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<td>• Law and Policy?</td>
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### Patient Preferences

Other Useful Information and Contacts

The Four Box Method may assist nurses managing challenging clinical ethical issues. The following people and organisations may also be of assistance.

- Patient advocate
- District Health Board Ethics Committee
- Local ethics committee
- Ministry of Health
- Nursing Council of New Zealand
- Health and Disability Commissioner
- Department of Labour – Health and Safety Unit


### Other Useful Information and Contacts

Useful Publications


**NZNO Membership**

NZNO is the leading professional body of nurses and nursing union in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing over 46 000 nurses, midwives, students, kaimahi hauora and health workers on a range of employment-related and professional issues. Te Runanga o Aotearoa comprises our Māori membership and is the arm through which our Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership is articulated.

NZNO provides leadership, research and support for professional excellence in nursing, negotiates collective employment agreements on behalf of its members and collaborates with government and other agencies throughout the health sector. Nurses are the largest group of health professionals comprising half the health workforce.

Contact us on 080028 38 48 or visit our website [www.nzno.org.nz](http://www.nzno.org.nz)