

## A Process to Manage Challenging Professional/Ethical Issues

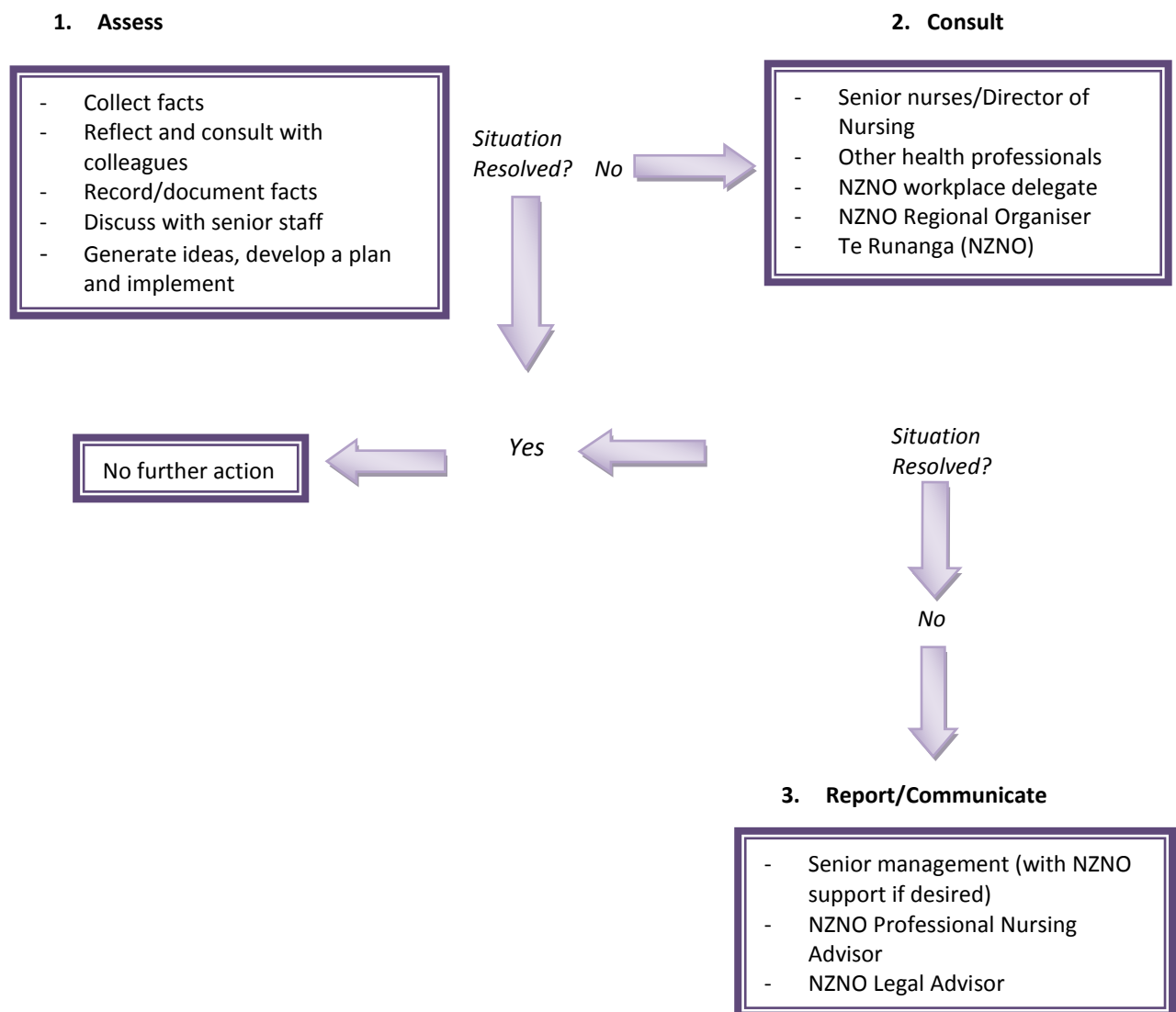
Being prepared to address challenging ethical and professional issues with knowledge and identified procedures is the key to ensuring such issues are resolved in a timely and appropriate manner.

### *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:



Clinical Issues	Patient Preferences
<p><i>The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the patient's medical history/diagnosis/prognosis?</li> <li>• What are the treatment options?</li> <li>• What are the goals of treatment?</li> <li>• What is the benefit to the patient?</li> </ul>	<p><i>The principle of respect for autonomy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the patient's expressed preferences for treatment?</li> <li>• Is the patient competent?</li> <li>• What would they want done?</li> <li>• What is in their best interests?</li> </ul>
Quality of Life	Contextual Features
<p><i>The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence and respect for autonomy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prospects of survival with and without treatment?</li> <li>• Various effects of patient of treatment?</li> <li>• What are the plans for comfort and palliative care?</li> </ul>	<p><i>The principles of loyalty and fairness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this affect others: family whānau and team?</li> <li>• Cost to Central health system?</li> <li>• Cultural/religious issues?</li> <li>• Law and Policy?</li> </ul>

Ref: McDonald, M., Rodney, P., & Starzomski, R., (2001). *A framework for ethical decision-making: Version 6*. Ethics Software. Adapted from Jonsen, A., Siegler, M., & Winslade, W. (1992). *Clinical Ethics (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. New York, McGraw Hill. (reproduced with permission from M. McDonald). The framework is available on line at [www.ethics.ubc.ca](http://www.ethics.ubc.ca)

## ***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

## ***Useful Publications***

- Burgess, M. (2005). *A guide to the law for nurses and midwives (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)*. Auckland, New Zealand: Longman Paul.
- Johnstone, M.J. (2008). *Bioethics: A nursing perspective (5<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Sydney, Australia: Harcourt Sanders.
- Keenan, R. (2010). *Health care and the law (4<sup>th</sup> NZ ed)*. Wellington, New Zealand: Brookers.
- McDonald, M., Rodney, P., & Starzomski, R. (2010). *A Framework for ethical decision-making: Version 6*. Ethics Shareware. Retrieved from [www.ethics.ubc.ca](http://www.ethics.ubc.ca)
- Nursing Council of New Zealand. (2009). *Code of conduct for nurses*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author.
- New Zealand Nurses Organisation. (2010). *Code of ethics*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author.
- New Zealand Nurses Organisation. (2009). *Social policy statement*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author.

## ***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 hauroa 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.*

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