



## Managing 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.

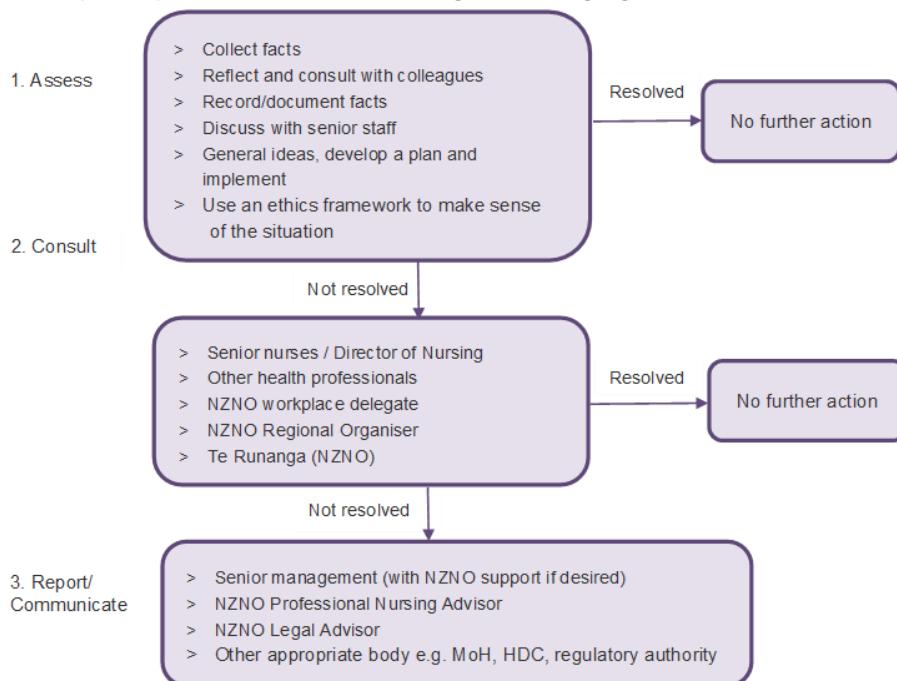
### What is a Challenging professional or Ethical Issue?

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 including encourage open and honest debate on ethical issues affecting nursing practice and standards of care.
- Familiarise yourself with legislation, institutional policies and the NZNO Code of Ethics.
- Lobby to change situations which are potentially incompatible with ethical nursing practice.
- Seek professional and legal advice.
- Hold membership of a professional organisation.
- Request a te ao Māori approach which can be a restorative to uphold cultural safety standards of ethical beliefs and practices (note a kaupapa Māori approach led by experts in restorative frameworks will need to support the application of this process).
- Explicit reference is given to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (te Tiriti) which guarantees active protection of tino rangatiratanga, īritetanga – equity, options and partnership. Body of text

These steps may assist nurses to manage challenging situations:



## 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
- Relevant Human Ethics Committee
- Local ethics committee
- Ministry of Health
- Nursing Council of New Zealand
- Health and Disability Commissioner
- Department of Labour – Health and Safety Unit

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 to make their own decisions?</li><li>• What would they want done?</li><li>• What is in their best interests?</li></ul>
<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. R., Siegler, M., & Winslade, W. (1992). Clinical Ethics (3rd edition). New York, McGraw Hill. (reproduced with permission from M. McDonald). The framework is available online: [A-Framework-for-Ethical-Decision-Making.pdf](http://www.nzno.org.nz/ethics-framework-for-ethical-decision-making.pdf)

## Other things to consider

- Who benefits from this decision?
- Who is impacted negatively?
- Could there be blind spots for me?
- If your roles were reversed, what would I want to another person to do?
- What decision would I feel proud of?
- What decision would I want other to know about?

## Long term strategies

- Identify recurring problems.
- Raise issues with those concerned.

- Arrange time to discuss the issues either with your colleagues and/or the team and/or your manager.
- Focus on future strategies rather than injustices from the past.
- Appreciate that people are different and come with different perspectives.

## Useful Publications

Burgess, M. (2008). A guide to the law for nurses and midwives (4th Ed). Auckland: Pearson.  
[https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Guide+to+the+Law+for+Nurses+and+Midwives+updated.\\_-a0177449591](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Guide+to+the+Law+for+Nurses+and+Midwives+updated._-a0177449591)

Johnstone, M.J. (2019). Bioethics: A nursing perspective (7th Ed). Sydney: Elsevier.  
<https://shop.elsevier.com/books/bioethics/johnstone/978-0-7295-4322-4>

Keenan, R. (2016). Health care and the law (5th Ed). Wellington: Thomson Reuters.  
<https://www.thomsonreuters.co.nz/en.html>

Colero, L. (2018). A Framework For Universal Principles of Ethics. <https://ethics.ubc.ca/colero-html/>

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. (2026). A Framework for Ethical Decision Making.  
<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/a-framework-for-ethical-decision-making/>

Nursing Council of New Zealand. (2012). Code of conduct for nurses. Wellington: Author.  
[https://www.nursingcouncil.org.nz/Public/Nursing/Code\\_of\\_Conduct/NCNZ/nursing-section/Code\\_of\\_Conduct.aspx](https://www.nursingcouncil.org.nz/Public/Nursing/Code_of_Conduct/NCNZ/nursing-section/Code_of_Conduct.aspx)

New Zealand Nurses Organisation. (2019). Code of ethics. Wellington: Author.  
<https://www.nzno.org.nz/Portals/0/publications/Guideline%20-%20Code%20of%20Ethics%202019.pdf?ver=19LQpYx8wspprbTNt9pWw%3d%3d>

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### Mission Statement

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery. NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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