



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.

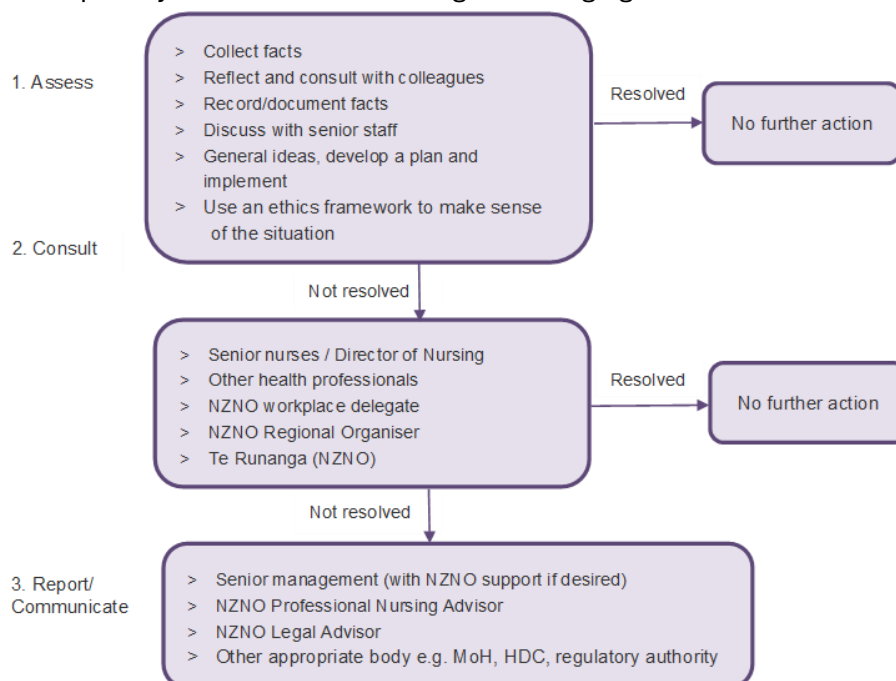
What is a Challenging professional or Ethical Issue?

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

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](#)

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>

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

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=19LQpYx8wspprjbTNt9pWw%3d%3d>

Date adopted: 2025

Review date: 2030

Reviewed by: Professional Services Team

Principle author: Professional Services Team

Correspondence to: nurses@nzno.org.nz

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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