

ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN NURSING

Abstract

The nursing profession requires a high level of professionalism and is founded on a strong ethical foundation. Ethical considerations in nursing include patient autonomy, confidentiality, informed consent, end-of-life care, and resource allocation, among others. When balancing the autonomy and preferences of patients with the need to promote their best interests and ensure optimal healthcare outcomes, nurses frequently face ethical dilemmas. In addition, traversing the complexities of cultural diversity, socioeconomic disparities, and personal beliefs exacerbates the difficulty of making ethical decisions in nursing practise. Maintaining competence, adhering to professional standards, and upholding the principles of accountability and integrity are professional concerns in nursing. Challenges including maintaining professional boundaries, managing conflicts of interest, preventing exhaustion, and ensuring the delivery of safe and effective care require nurses to navigate complex professional environments. To address these ethical and professional issues, a comprehensive strategy is required, including ethical education, ongoing professional development, and the establishment of robust ethical frameworks within healthcare organisations. Nursing ethics committees, professional nursing associations, and regulatory bodies play essential roles in guiding ethical decision-making, offering support, and enforcing standards of practise. Collaboration between healthcare professionals and interdisciplinary teams can also aid in the resolution of complex ethical dilemmas, fostering shared decision-making and holistic care. Nurses must have a firm grasp of ethical principles and frameworks and the ability to employ ethical reasoning in their daily practise.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the nursing profession, ethical and professional issues arise frequently, posing complex challenges that affect patient care and the well-being of healthcare providers. By prioritising ethical decision-making, nurturing a supportive work environment, and promoting continuous education, nurses can provide optimal patient care while navigating their profession's complexities. The most important ethical issues in nursing, such as sustaining patient autonomy, ensuring informed consent, protecting patient confidentiality, managing end-of-life decisions, and allocating limited resources fairly. When balancing the rights and desires of patients with medical best practises, cultural considerations, and legal obligations, nurses frequently face moral dilemmas. Additionally, situations involving ethical misconduct, workplace abuse, scope of practise boundaries, and conflicts of interest present ethical challenges. Professionalism, which encompasses competence, integrity, accountability, and effective collaboration, is another vital aspect of nursing practise.¹ Organisations should encourage ongoing professional development and provide opportunities for nurses to improve their knowledge, abilities, and ethical reasoning. Encouraging a culture of open communication, mutual respect, and interprofessional collaboration can address professional issues such as conflicts with colleagues, issues related to delegation and supervision, and assuring the quality and safety of healthcare delivery. The importance of ethical leadership in fostering ethical practise in nursing cannot be overstated. Leaders in nursing should exemplify ethical behaviour, foster an environment where ethical dilemmas can be debated openly, and advocate for resources and support systems that facilitate ethical decision-making. Leaders can also establish mechanisms for reporting and addressing ethical issues, ensuring that ethical violations are dealt with expeditiously and openly.

Continuing education is essential for nurses to navigate the ever-changing healthcare ethics landscape. Organisations should provide nurses with access to ethics training, seminars, and resources in order to enhance their ethical competence and critical thinking abilities. Incorporating ethical considerations into nursing curricula can also assist in preparing future nurses to confidently navigate complex ethical scenarios.²

II. ETHICAL ISSUE

Nursing is a noble profession that requires adherence to a code of ethics and maintenance of professional standards. However, the complexity of healthcare settings frequently poses numerous ethical and professional challenges for nurses. The following are some of the most significant ethical and professional issues encountered by nurses and their implications for patient care and nursing practise.

1. Maintaining patient privacy and confidentiality is an essential ethical obligation for nurses. However, in the era of electronic health records and information sharing, patient privacy becomes more difficult to maintain. Nurses must navigate the ethical quandary of sharing patient information while protecting patients' privacy rights. Breach of confidentiality can result in mistrust, diminished care, and legal repercussions.
2. End-of-Life Care: End-of-life decisions, such as withholding or discontinuing life-sustaining treatment, present nurses with ethical dilemmas. Emotionally challenging is balancing patient autonomy, family wishes, and professional obligations. Nurses must have the knowledge and communication skills necessary to provide compassionate care while respecting the preferences and cultural beliefs of their patients.

3. Allocation of Resources: Limited resources, force nurses to make difficult choices. Ethically allocating resources requires consideration of patient severity, prognosis, and community benefit maximisation. When nurses perceive resource allocation decisions as unjust or contrary to their professional values, they may experience moral distress.
4. Shortages in the nursing workforce and heavy responsibilities contribute to the burnout of nurses. When nurses are unable to provide safe and high-quality care due to insufficient staffing or exhaustion, ethical concerns arise. This issue affects the safety of patients, the well-being of nurses, and the retention of qualified professionals. Ethical considerations include advocating for sufficient personnel levels and promoting self-care methods.
5. Cultural Competence and Diversity: Nurses interact with a variety of patient populations with distinct cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Respecting individual beliefs, values, and practises is a component of culturally competent care. When nurses lack knowledge about particular cultural practises or have personal biases, they may face ethical challenges. Overcoming these obstacles requires continuous education, introspection, and the promotion of diversity in the nursing profession.^{3,4,5}

III. PROFESSIONAL ISSUE

There are numerous professional issues that nurses frequently face. Depending on the setting, specialty, and context of practise, these concerns can vary. Here are some prevalent nursing professional issues:

1. Nurses are frequently confronted with ethical dilemmas that require them to make difficult decisions. This could include situations involving conflicting values, principles, or obligations, such as decisions regarding end-of-life care, the allocation of limited resources, or the disclosure of medical information.
2. Patient Advocacy: It is essential for nurses to advocate for the rights, preferences, and well-being of patients. However, balancing patient advocacy with other responsibilities and constraints within the healthcare system can be difficult. It is essential to advocate for patients' best interests while collaborating with the healthcare team.
3. Workload and Staffing Concerns: Nurses frequently face excessive burdens and staffing shortages, which can compromise patient safety and care quality. Inadequate staffing levels may result in increased tension, burnout, and the possibility of making mistakes. While assuring patient safety and advocating for adequate staffing ratios, nurses might need to navigate these issues.
4. Communication and Collaboration: Communication and collaboration are essential in healthcare settings, but hierarchical structures, miscommunication, and a lack of interprofessional collaboration can present obstacles. There may be challenges for nurses in communicating vital information, collaborating with other healthcare professionals, and navigating team conflicts.
5. Scope of Practise and Autonomy: Nurses are occasionally confronted with obstacles regarding their scope of practise and autonomy. This may include situations in which nurses are not permitted to practise to the full extent of their education and training or encounter obstacles when implementing evidence-based practises. Professional issues can include advocating for expanded roles and autonomy within the healthcare system.
6. Cultural Competence and Diversity: Since nurses work with diverse patient populations, cultural competence and diversity issues may arise. Providing culturally sensitive care, comprehending diverse health beliefs and practises, and addressing health disparities

necessitate ongoing education and sensitivity. It may be difficult for nurses to provide equitable care to individuals of numerous cultural backgrounds.

7. Professional Development and Lifelong Learning: Nursing is an ever-evolving profession, and it is essential to remain current with innovations, technologies, and evidence-based practises. Accessing continuing education, pursuing professional development opportunities, and balancing work obligations with learning and growth may be difficult for nurses.^{6,7}

IV. ETHICAL PRINCIPAL

Ethical principles are foundational rules or standards that assist individuals and societies in determining what is morally right or wrong. These principles provide the basis for ethical decision-making and conduct. Despite the existence of various ethical frameworks and theories, there are several widely accepted ethical principles that serve as the foundation for ethical considerations. Here are some of the most important ethical guidelines:

1. Respect for autonomy: Respecting individual autonomy entails recognising and valuing a person's freedom to make decisions and choices for themselves so long as they do not harm others. It involves promoting liberty, autonomy, and independence.
2. Beneficence: This principle emphasises the obligation to promote the well-being and welfare of others through one's actions. It involves performing actions with the intention of doing good, maximising benefits, and minimising harm. Beneficence entails weighing the hazards and benefits of a course of action and aiming to maximise the overall positive outcome.
3. Nonmaleficence refers to the principle of refraining from causing damage. It involves refraining from actions or interventions that could cause harm, injury, or unnecessary suffering to others. This principle also includes the concept of preventing and minimising injury whenever possible.
4. Justice refers to the principle of treating individuals fairly, equitably, and impartially. It emphasises the need for equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and burdens, as well as legal equality for all individuals. Social justice focuses on addressing systemic inequalities and fostering a more just and equitable society.
5. The concept of veracity entails honesty and truthfulness. It involves communicating truthfully and openly, ensuring that information is accurate and complete and avoiding deception and misleading others. Building trust and maintaining ethical relationships requires veracity.
6. Confidentiality is the practise of respecting and protecting the privacy of individuals. It involves maintaining the confidentiality of personal, sensitive, or privileged information entrusted to you, unless there are compelling reasons or legal requirements to disclose such information.
7. Fidelity, or faithfulness, is the principle of upholding obligations, commitments, and trust. It involves displaying loyalty, dependability, and trustworthiness. Additionally, fidelity includes the obligation to uphold professional standards, adhere to ethical codes, and fulfil obligations and agreements.

V. PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING THE PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL ISSUE

1. **Identify and Define the Issues:** The initial step in addressing professional and ethical issues is to identify and define the issue at hand. It could include conflicts with co-workers, competency issues, violations of patient confidentiality, and end-of-life care dilemmas.
2. **Engage in self-reflection** to understand your own values, biases, and beliefs that may influence your perception of the issue. Consider how personal factors may influence your decision-making. Consider seeking counsel from mentors or superiors in order to acquire new perspectives.
3. **Continual Education and Research:** Remain current with the most recent nursing practises, scientific evidence, and ethical guidelines. Continually educate yourself on nursing-specific ethical principles and legal obligations. This knowledge will enable you to make informed decisions and effectively navigate professional and ethical obstacles.
4. **Seek Guidance and Consultation:** When confronted with complex professional or ethical issues, consult with experienced colleagues, nursing leaders, or ethics committees for guidance. Consultation facilitates the acquisition of diverse perspectives and ethical perspectives, resulting in well-rounded decision-making.
5. **Foster an atmosphere of open and honest communication** among your healthcare team. Engage in conversations to resolve problems, voice concerns, and develop collaborative solutions. Effective communication can aid in conflict resolution and promote a positive professional atmosphere.
6. **Observe Ethical Standards and Codes of Conduct:** Acquaint yourself with the nursing code of ethics or professional standards applicable to your nation or organisation. Ensure that your actions during ethical dilemmas adhere to these guidelines. Your decision-making process should be guided by ethical principles like autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice.
7. **Frameworks for Ethical Decision-Making:** When confronted with ethical dilemmas, structure your approach using frameworks for ethical decision-making. Models such as the four principles (autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice) and the ethical decision-making model (identify the problem, collect information, develop alternatives, implement action, and evaluate results) provide a systematic process for making ethical decisions.
8. **Engage in Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Include the patient, the patient's family, and other healthcare professionals in the decision-making process for complex ethical issues. Collaboration across disciplines permits a holistic approach and ensures that all perspectives are considered.
9. **Participate in professional development activities, seminars, and conferences** that emphasise ethical decision making, communication skills, and conflict resolution. Improving your knowledge and abilities will enable you to more effectively manage professional and ethical challenges.
10. **Maintain thorough documentation of decisions made, actions taken, and their justifications.** Reflect frequently on the outcomes and evaluate the efficacy of your interventions. Utilise this information to perpetually enhance your practise and decision-making skills.^{8,9}

VI. NURSES ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Registered nurses are accountable for promoting and restoring health, preventing illness, and safeguarding those entrusted to their care. They strive to ease the suffering of individuals, families, communities, and groups. In doing so, nurses provide services that respect human dignity and acknowledge the uniqueness of each patient and the nature of his or her health problems, irrespective of socioeconomic status. To maximise the contributions of nurses to society, it is essential to protect their dignity and autonomy at work. Consequently, the privileges listed below must be granted:^{10,11,12}

1. Nurses are able to comply with professional standards and legally authorised scopes of practise.
2. According to the Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements, nurses are entitled to a work environment that encourages and facilitates ethical practise.
3. Nurses have the right to advocate openly and fearlessly for themselves and their patients.
4. Nurses are entitled to a secure working environment for themselves and their patients.
5. Nurses are entitled to a wage commensurate with their knowledge, experience, and professional responsibilities.
6. Individually or collectively, nurses have the opportunity to negotiate their employment conditions in all practise contexts.
7. Among a nurse's responsibilities is advancing their professional skills through continuing education.
8. Nursing practise is constantly evolving. New treatment modalities, research into treatment efficacy, and constant progress in our understanding of patients' problems necessitate the participation of the practising nurse in ongoing professional development. Wise leaders promote staff growth by encouraging attendance at continuing education conferences and membership in professional nursing organisations. These opportunities, as well as journal readings, in-house and digital educational media are utilised by astute nurses to advance their professional development.
9. Through research, education, and practise, nurses must collaborate with other health care providers to develop and implement integrated models for the delivery of health care. These partnerships must also develop public policies to enhance the health of the populations they serve.
10. As nurses, we must form strategic alliances to promote the utilisation of research data and evidence-based practise in the creation and implementation of new and improved care patterns. Too much of our current practise is founded on "traditions" that are no longer valid or produce expensive, suboptimal outcomes. It is our responsibility to collaborate within our profession and with other professionals to evaluate all current practises and promote those whose efficacy results in the best possible outcomes for each patient and episode of care.
11. Nurses are responsible for advocating for enhancements to healthcare policy and legislation.
12. As the largest group of healthcare providers, nurses must collaborate with other provider professions to develop and promote evidence-based health policy. We must educate and communicate with healthcare providers, consumers, and policymakers to promote policies that increase access to healthcare services and competent, cost-effective healthcare.

13. Nurses are responsible for promoting nursing's image and the public's comprehension of nursing's role in the healthcare delivery system to other professionals and the general public.
14. Nurses are responsible for promoting nursing's role in the healthcare delivery system to other professionals and the general public. ^{13,14}
15. Nurses are responsible for advocating and promoting health for all individuals. The duty of nurses is to collaborate with other healthcare providers, community organisations, and legislators to increase the number of healthy years of life for community members and eliminate disparities in healthcare delivery systems. We recognise that the vast majority of healthcare expenditures are devoted to health restoration, while only a small fraction is allocated to health promotion.

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