**Recognizing and navigating ethical issues in Nursing**

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**Introduction:**

Any healthcare professional must uphold ethical principles. Ethos, which means character in Greek, is the origin of the word ethics. Ethics are universal standards of behaviour that serve as a useful guide for determining the behaviours, reasons, and intentions that are appreciated.**1** Ethics are moral principles that guide a person's or a group's behaviour and conduct. The decision-making process for evaluating the final effects of those actions is also included. The focus is on the right and wrong of actions.**2** Every individual has a unique set of personal ethics and morals. Because healthcare professionals must recognise ethical dilemmas and make moral decisions while abiding by the laws that control them, ethics within the industry is crucial. Nurses, like all healthcare professionals, require control and direction within the field in order to work competently and honourably.**3**In the Indian setting, when health indices are poor, the problem of ethics and economic efficiency in the provisioning and delivery of services becomes complicated.**4** Health care workers frequently run into ethical and legal problems at work, which puts them at risk for burnout. The pressure on workers to achieve more with less is growing as efforts are made to rein in health care expenditures. The quality of care must be compromised due to a lack of resources. Patient safety may be jeopardized, leading to harm and legal action. According to bio-ethicists, applying the ethical concepts of autonomy, fairness, doing good, and doing no harm can aid medical personnel in resolving challenging circumstances.**5**

The 21st century is regulated by a bewildering variety of laws, rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines. Even when healthcare professionals have the best of intentions, problems with confidentiality, informed consent, and patient relationships can arise out of nowhere. There is a constant risk of being sued for negligence and malpractice, and what is ethically acceptable today might not be judged legal. While medical techniques deemed appropriate for adults might not be viewed as ethical for minors, there are still unresolved issues around doctor assisted dying that need to be worked out.**6**

When it comes to healthcare, ethical concerns are a branch of applied ethics that is concerned with the moral judgments that medical staff members must make. The moral and ethical perspectives in medicine frequently change depending on the nation and culture. Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress have created a common method for addressing ethical issues in healthcare that transcend national boundaries and cultural differences.**7**

Four fundamental ethical principles for making decisions in the healthcare industry are embraced by this ethical framework.

**Autonomy**: To preserve the patient's autonomy, ascertain their wants.

**Justice**: Follow the proper procedures to set healthcare spending caps and treat all patients fairly.

**Beneficience:** Assess what is a good to be pursued and look out for the patient's best interests.

**Non-malefficience**: Find out what constitutes harms to prevent.

These guidelines can assist healthcare providers in identifying moral conundrums and resolving them by speaking with patients about their wants and needs.

**Ethical issues in health care:**

Patients, families, and healthcare workers must make moral and legal decisions every day. These challenging conundrums may relate to medical procedures, methods, hospital administration, and other issues that emerge in the healthcare sector. Making decisions for patients while they are unable to do so is an example of an immediate ethical dilemma in healthcare. Other ethical concerns may call for a more thorough, deliberate approach, such as the debate over the right to an abortion or assisted suicide. The decisions made about moral dilemmas in healthcare make it obvious what is good and wrong, and frequently, many of the decisions made today could have a long-term impact on healthcare in the future.**8**

Healthcare professionals, clinical leaders, and patients all face a variety of ethical difficulties. Common medical ethical dilemmas include, for instance:

1. **Privacy and confidentiality for patients:**

One of the most significant ethical and legal concerns in the healthcare industry is the preservation of patient privacy. Both information concerning a patient's medical condition and conversations between a doctor and a patient are absolutely secret. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA, specifies which information can be disclosed to whom and under what circumstances.

1. **The Spread of Illness:**

The right of healthcare professionals to safeguard themselves from infectious diseases, whether through direct or indirect contact with an infected patient, has received increasing attention in light of the recent global Ebola virus outbreak. When a patient's medical history is not disclosed to the personnel, ethical and legal issues arise.

1. **Relationships:**

A healthcare centre has a stringent policy against any sexual interactions between medical staff members or patients. Because sexual harassment can be detrimental to all parties involved, including the facility, the code of ethics needs to make this clear.

1. **Death and Dying Issues**:

Patients who are nearing the end of their lives may have specific wishes for how they want to pass away. The choice to remove a loved one's life support can be difficult for families to make. Healthcare professionals and clinical leaders need to be equipped to deal with both end-of-life difficulties and issues that arise when caring for elderly patients who may not be able to make their own reasonable decisions.

1. **Efficiency and Care Quality in Balance :**

It might be difficult to evaluate how well health systems function.

Two different sorts of risk result from this. On the one hand, decision-makers could come to the wrong conclusion about how to identify and deal with inefficiency, allowing bad performance to continue. Even worse, if spending cutbacks are necessary, decision-makers who adopt this pessimistic outlook might make indiscriminate, across-the-board cuts, running the risk of eliminating both inefficient and highly cost-effective activities. The second kind of risk is the use of insufficient analysis or interpretation of efficiency indicators by decision-makers to carry out reforms that go after practises that appear to be wasteful.**9** Quality care can be defined as meeting the patient's requirements and goals, both actual and perceived, with the least amount of resources possible. According to this definition, high-quality assistance would be that which includes appropriate individual care together with professional activities and ongoing care that are developed in accordance with the most current, accurate, and correctly implemented scientific information.**10**

1. **aggressive advertising techniques :**

When advertising and marketing a hospital's services, certain rules, ethics, and standards must be followed. It is totally unacceptable for hospitals to suggest pointless services to a patient only to make money. Patient care, not marketing strategies, should be the hospital's primary objective. To ensure that any marketing campaign is tasteful and authentic, ethical committees should always be involved in some way in the facility's marketing procedures.**11**

1. **Provided facts**:

This is the one ethical matter in healthcare that can never receive enough consideration. A hospital must supply completely accurate and truthful information to advertising companies. It is crucial that the hospital's and its services' ads are truthful and accurate. Again, the welfare of the patients comes first.

1. **patient safety:**

A doctor, nurse, or other healthcare worker caring for a patient needs to keep in mind that their first goal is to ensure their welfare. All confidential information must be kept that way. It's crucial for doctors to be truthful with their patients. No patient should ever be subjected to discrimination on the basis of colour, income, or sex, regardless of the personal opinions of the healthcare provider. Such discriminatory reports ought to be treated very seriously.

1. **geriatric patients:**

Considering that elderly individuals are unable to make ethical decisions on their own, dealing with them might occasionally present challenges. The burden of making challenging decisions falls on their families as a result. When a person has a fatal illness and wishes to end their life to spare themselves needless pain, this process can be exceedingly challenging. Even if there are disagreements among the members of the ethical committee on these issues, proper ethical protocol must always be followed. To minimise unneeded uncertainty, it is vital to confirm whether the patient has a living will.

1. **Therapies:**

In order to reduce any trauma or stress resulting from an offending act, a patient or victim can be treated using a variety of approaches and therapies. There may also be hearings and inquiries regarding the incident.

In the modern healthcare industry, a wide variety of ethical problems could come up. The duty of an ethics committee of a hospital is to guarantee that all of its practitioners are familiar with the basic ethical principles.

**Professional ethics:**

There are numerous approaches to introducing practical/professional ethics with various focuses.**12**

1.The pragmatic

2.The embedded

3.Theoretical

4.Emerging Problems

**The pragmatic:**

By taking into account how they might affect real-world situations, ethical considerations are introduced. The definition of consequences is in connection to:

• The foundation for policies and practises established by regulatory organisations tasked in raising or upholding standards of professionalism.

• The components of research ethics committees and affect how they decide.

**The embedded:**

Ethical issues are presented holistically as a component of a larger area of concern, such as professionalism or fitness for practise.

The notion of professional identity is emphasised by the embedded approach.

**Theoretical:**

This strategy focuses on comprehending ethical theory.

The application of various ethical theories to real-world circumstances is how the ethics of those situations are portrayed.

**Emerging Problems:**

Professional ethics seeks to direct and mould graduate behaviour in order to fulfil public expectations with regard to professional conduct and accountability, which raises new questions and problems.

**Ethical issues in nursing:**

When decisions must be taken but there are imperfect possibilities and unclear answers, ethical problems arise. Poorer patient care, troubled clinical relationships, and moral distress—which is defined as knowing what is right to do but not being able to do it—could be the outcomes. Because of their leadership and mentoring responsibilities, nurse managers in particular are vulnerable to moral anguish and nursing ethics problems. Nurse managers are trusted by nurses and other medical personnel to make morally sound decisions.**13**

**Clinical relevance:**

All healthcare professionals must uphold high ethical standards. For nurses, who deal with ethical dilemmas on a daily basis, ethical practise provides a foundation. While nurses are caring for patients, ethical problems arise. These conundrums could occasionally be at odds with the code of ethics or the ethical principles of the nurse. While providing patient care, nurses must strike a balance because they are also the patients' advocates. Autonomy, beneficence, justice, and non-maleficence are the four major tenets of ethics.

Every patient has the freedom to make their own choices in accordance with their personal values and views. **14**Autonomy is what we call this. The best care recommendations or guidelines held by nurses or other healthcare professionals may be at odds with a patient's need for autonomy. Regardless of any potential benefits, a person has the freedom to reject any medications, treatments, surgeries, or other medical procedures. The nurse must respect the patient's decision if they opt not to undergo a treatment that might be beneficial.

Healthcare professionals have a responsibility to treat patients with kindness, to minimise damage, and to promote good. This obligation of specific treatment delineating goodness. This is demonstrated by healthcare professionals by balancing the patient's rewards and hazards. Examples of beneficence include assisting patients with chores that they are unable to complete on their own, maintaining side rails for fall protection, and promptly dispensing prescriptions.

Everyone has the right to expect fair and equitable treatment from other people. Justice refers to how individuals are treated when their interests conflict with those of others.**15** The issue of some people's lack of health insurance is currently a major topic. Another illustration involves patients who may not have access to the same medical treatments as those available in urban areas because they live in rural places.

There should be no harm done to patients. In order to practise non-maleficence, nurses must refrain from hurting patients.**16**The hardest rule to uphold is probably this one. The nurse is placed in a morally difficult situation when life support is turned off or when patients decide not to take life-saving medication.

The Code of Ethics for nurses should be familiar to them, and they should also be conscious of their own morality and integrity. Key ethical standards should be understood by nurses on a fundamental and explicit level. While fighting for patients' rights to self-identify their needs and cultural norms, the nursing profession must remain committed to its mission of patient care. Despite being difficult, ethical issues in nursing truly integrate the art of patient care.

Nurses must uphold the highest ethical standards for the benefit of their patients, their profession, and themselves. To assess ethical issues, many organisations have established ethics boards. Involvement of nurses at all practise levels in the intended specialty area's ethics review is recommended. It is crucial to speak up in favour of patient care, patient rights, and practise ethics. The integration of ethics should start in nursing school and continue throughout the nurse's career.

**Nursing ethical dilemmas:**

Nurse managers can evaluate ethical concerns in nursing using the criteria set forth in the ANA Code of Ethics. However, how it approaches moral conundrums might change depending on the circumstance. When nurses lack the necessary tools to perform their duties, an ethical quandary may arise in healthcare facilities. Nurses who observe a colleague's ignorance are faced with the moral choice of whether to bring the situation up with their nurse manager. Nurse managers can make a concerted effort to educate their nurses about the Code of Ethics as well as the Code of Ethics for their particular medical facility in order to help resolve this ethical conundrum. Nurse supervisors can also regularly train their staff nurses on reoccurring problems.

Setting boundaries with patients is one example of a typical ethical challenge nurses face. It can be challenging to draw lines between personal and professional relationships because nurses and nurse managers spend their entire careers assisting patients in receiving the care they require. Patients shouldn't rely on nurses more than is necessary for their jobs, and they shouldn't date them or give them gifts. When ethical and professional lines are crossed by patients or nurses, nurse supervisors can step in to interfere.

Regarding patient privacy, there is yet another ethical dilemma in nursing. Although nurses and nurse managers have access to a patient's medical history and records, they are not permitted by law or ethical standards to disclose this information to anyone other than the patient. While keeping in mind the necessity to protect patients' privacy and medical information, nurses should always have their patients' best interests in mind.

**Examples of ethical dilemmas that frequently faced by nurse managers:**

Even though nursing is a fast-paced profession with constantly changing obstacles, many nurse supervisors describe encountering similar moral conundrums. According to a recent study, decision-making, staffing, advanced care planning, and defending patients' rights are the most frequent and stressful ethical circumstances. The fact that so many novice nurses are entering the profession and many of them have never had to deal with ethical dilemmas in nursing is aggravating the issue. Due to these difficulties, skilled nurse managers are even more essential to the nation's ongoing healthcare demands.**17**

Additional instances of typical ethical dilemmas that nurse managers encounter include the following:

**Honesty versus information withholding**: In order to preserve the patients' feelings, family members may desire to keep medical information from sick people. Patients do, however, have a right to information regarding their medical issues. It can be difficult to decide how to disclose this information, especially if it contradicts the family's beliefs. The ANA promotes honesty as a crucial element in nurse-patient interactions.

**Science vs. spirituality**: Because healthcare is science-based and results-oriented, it may conflict with one's personal or religious convictions. Some faiths forbid using life-saving measures and medical procedures. Nurses concentrate on providing medical care in order to lessen suffering and free patients up to focus on self-care. The emphasis may be on following a stringent set of rules for patients or their families who have strong religious or spiritual beliefs. Nursing professionals are expected to respect the "unique differences of the patient," including "lifestyle, value system, and religious beliefs," according to the ANA Code of Ethics. Respect for a viewpoint, however, "does not indicate that the nurse personally endorses those ideas or actions."

**Resources allocated versus healthcare requirements:** Nurse managers are increasingly at odds with patient requirements and budgetary restrictions as healthcare costs rise. Patients run the danger of not receiving the care they require because there are several medical facilities with insufficient resources. These resources include anything from medical technology to medical personnel. According to research, nurse supervisors should involve staff in budgeting so they may better understand requirements and desires.

**beneficence versus autonomy**: Although patients have the option to decline medications, nurses are compelled to provide them. Despite having well defined needs, patient autonomy can conflict with medical recommendations. All medical care can be refused by patients. The ANA emphasises the demand for nurses and nurse managers to comprehend patient histories and unique circumstances in order to explain the medical necessity to patients. According to ANA, applying ethical principles to find a solution should be done in a setting of kindness, respect, candour, and openness. The best available evidence-based practise guidelines should be used in this process, which should be based on an ethically sound decision-making model.

**Process for dealing with ethical dilemmas in nursing:**

Before they can be qualified, nurses must complete years of schooling and practical training, but managing ethical dilemmas in the real world of nursing can be much more challenging. Through experience and patient interaction, nurses can learn how to handle ethical situations in the job. Although nurses have a high level of empathy, it can be advantageous for them to put up limits with each patient early in their careers. Nurses can consult the ANA Code of Ethics whenever they are unsure whether something is moral.

Additionally, nurses might gain from surrounding themselves with seasoned nurses and nurse managers. When faced with circumstances they may not be familiar with, they can rely on the advice of nurse supervisors. By constantly discussing ethical concerns with the nurses in their units, nurse managers may foster educational environments. Nurses can learn from others' errors and develop effective coping mechanisms by engaging in open discussions about ethical problems.**18**

**Recognize the Particularity of the Problem:**

Consult with all parties concerned to gain insight into the particulars of a situation. Get as much information as you can about the problem. From this point, you can work with all sides to reach a point of agreement. This may finally result in a solution that benefits all parties.

Expecting a problem to go away on its own is unrealistic. Instead, a problem might continue, especially if the persons involved choose to disregard it. You can bring a problem to the attention of everyone involved by opening the lines of communication about it. This may result in cooperation and communication in relation to the problem. It might also lead to a swift and successful resolution.

**Signify the code of ethics:**

A practise framework is provided by the ANA Code of Ethics. According to Turner, nurses should be conversant with and regularly apply the code. Hospitals should include ethical behaviour in job descriptions and take that into account when conducting annual performance reviews.

It was necessary to address the value and moral dilemmas underlying many of the life-and-death choices nurses make on a daily basis via a point of reference.

The Code, sometimes known as "The Code," is a much-needed reference manual that nurses can use to support and guide their judgments.

**provide continual training:**

All educational programmes, including orientation for new employees, should cover ethics and provide realistic examples of how to apply theoretical concepts to real-world problems.

The better off you will be, the more you will understand about ethics. As you develop an understanding of ethics, you may face moral quandaries head-on. This will enable you to play a significant role in finding solutions to problems as they arise. It might also present new nursing career options.

**offer a space where nurses can voice their opinions:**

It is crucial to have a practice environment that encourages nurses to voice their ethical concerns and gives them the authority to do so.

Think about how you will approach an ethical challenge before you bring it up. Include the necessary parties and schedule time to communicate with them. You can then use these insights to fix the problem precisely and carefully.**19**

**Look for perspective:**

Ask for a family meeting if you can. The care team frequently develops a fresh viewpoint when moral conundrums are brought up in front of family members. The family members could help resolve the moral conundrum and exert some influence. You will at the very least understand your patient and the relativity involved much better.

Be understanding and patient with family members when you interact with them. Give a thorough explanation of the problem and provide some solutions. You ought to pay attention to what your relatives have to say and how they feel about the situation. You and your family members can look into potential answers together.

**Contact Professional Associations and Organizations:**

The majority of professional nursing organisations have access to nurse ethicists who can assist with ethical problems. Any of these situations faces difficulty since multiple perspectives on what is "right" exist. A nurse ethicist or a seasoned member of your nursing association can offer further understanding based on The Code and everyone's duty.

**Obtain counseling:**

Sometimes it's impossible to reach a conclusion without causing you personally emotional distress. Whether the moral conundrum brings up unresolved emotions or stirs up memories of a previous incident, you may be forced to seriously consider your job. Step back and take a deep breath. Consult your manager and get counselling. Counselors are usually available in big medical centres. Don't brush aside any emotions that this moral quandary may have triggered in you personally.

Do not delay to schedule a counselling appointment. Once you speak with this person, you can get assistance as you look into potential solutions to the problem. The counsellor can offer advice and direction for resolving disputes. As you look for the greatest answer possible, this expert can also help you become more confident.**20**

**Nursing Practice and Ethics Education :**

Complex moral issues are integrally linked to nursing practise. A newly minted nurse must be prepared to provide great patient care while juggling complex relationships with patients, families, doctors, nurses, and other members of the healthcare team from the minute they enter the clinical setting. The negotiating of these connections frequently leads to ethical tension. Because clinical practise involves "dependent, independent, and interdependent" judgments, Mila Aroskar emphasised the significance of ethics education in nursing forty years ago. These decisions might lead to ethical problems (1977, p. 260). **21**These confrontations, especially if they go unresolved, can result in an unsatisfied workforce and the departure of talented nurses who are exhausted both physically and emotionally.

The nursing profession is responsible for preparing nurses for the moral minefield that is clinical practise, and top-notch ethics pedagogy ought to be a fundamental part of nursing education. Didactic immersion is a first stage in developing professional identity because it immerses student nurses in the profession's ideals (such as social justice, advocacy, and beneficent care) and forces them to critically analyse their own presumptions, beliefs, and values. During the Obama administration, the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Topics proposed bioethics education for all professional organisations as a way to participate in ethically significant issues at both the micro and macro levels in 2016.

**Benefits, Drawbacks, and Strengths of a Utilitarian Approach to Nursing and Healthcare Practice:**

In bioethics, utilitarian approaches are frequently utilised, and some of the most well-known bioethicists worldwide are utilitarians. Utilitarians have had a significant impact on how people think about the usage of current and emerging technologies since they frequently support more technology-friendly viewpoints and are more upbeat about how they may improve society. Deontological and virtue ethical systems, on the other hand, frequently adopt more circumspect approaches. In addressing issues of broader societal concern, such as issues of global justice or animal rights, utilitarianism has also had an impact. Utilitarian arguments have been particularly prevalent in some of the following areas with reference to issues of healthcare delivery:

**End of life decision making:** In regards to the debate over euthanasia and assisted suicide, utilitarians have argued against drawing a line between killing and letting die (Glover 1990). They have claimed that it is crucial to take into account the suffering people go through at the end of their lives, where medical judgments to "let die" without really causing death may result in a great deal more misery than an active intervention would (Rachels 1975). 4 Utilitarian authors have also emphasised the significance of quality-of-life measures for treatment decisions, including the argument that if a foetus – or even, in some cases, a newborn – has a condition that will not allow them to have sufficient capacities and quality of life, then it might be ethically permissible to end their life (Kuhse and Singer 1985; Singer, personal communication, 1990).**22**

**human improvement:** Utilitarians have generally supported enhancements, which refer to the use of medical interventions for self-improvement rather than treatment of individuals whose conditions are within the normal range (Harris 2010; Savulescu and Bostrom 2009).**23**

Doping (Foddy and Savulescu 2007) or cognitive augmentation, such as with Ritalin, are examples of improvements that draw on current medical therapies (Greely et al. 2008).

**Research involvement:** All patients should be required to engage in research, according to utilitarian theory, in order to increase the body of data supporting evidence-based medicine and advance our knowledge (Harris 2005).**24**

**Resource distribution:** According to utilitarian theory, resources in the healthcare system should be distributed so as to produce the greatest utility for the least amount of money spent. Cost-benefit analysis is a fundamental tool in health economics, and it is founded on utilitarian principles (Torrance 1987).**25** It is applicable to all aspects of allocating resources for healthcare. Organ transplant decisions are one area where the use of utilitarian principles for allocation decisions has been thoroughly studied (Persad et al. 2009).**26** Particular issues are also brought up by certain utilitarians' beliefs that people with cognitive disabilities have less value than people with normal cognitive abilities (Vehmas 1999).**27**

**Conclusion:**

Beyond the obvious conclusion that nursing is work, viewing nursing as employment raises important ethical questions related to the rapidly evolving social realities. Work as a notion identifies societal divisions of labour, connects intellectual and manual labour, and conveys value by nature. An ethics of work is still just a concept, but we think that if it existed, nurses would begin to ask fresh questions and come up with new solutions to the moral problems we face today and in the near future.

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