

Critical Analysis of Nursing Ethics and Professional Standards

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Abstract

Nursing has a robust system of ethics that directs the operations and productivity of its professionals about patients. Ethical principles in nursing and a code of ethics are applicable in determining nurses' behaviour, decisions, and ethical concerns in clinical practice. This revised and expanded review synthesizes current literature about the ethical perspectives and relevant codes that inform the nursing profession, examines obstacles preventing compliance, and reviews the effects of ethical decisions on clients. Besides, the paper explores the dynamic aspect of nursing ethics about technologies, culture, and healthcare systems. The results indicate that there is a set of nursing ethics that guide nursing practice, but practical ethics experiences remain a challenge and, therefore, require constant training and counselling. The authors have concluded the paper with recommendations for how the ethics for nursing and professionalism of nursing could be developed more effectively so that the ethical requirements of the profession can be met in the context of the growing complexity of tomorrow's healthcare system.

Keywords: *Nursing Ethics, Professional Standards, Nursing Practice, Ethical Dilemmas, Patient Care, Healthcare, Moral Principles, Nursing Education, Ethical Decision-Making, Cultural Competence.*

Introduction

Nursing is a complex occupation in which one needs clinical skills and rich ethical experience. Nurses are also directly involved with the patients, and here are the duties of a registered nurse. The roles of a nurse include health promotion and prevention of diseases, identification of abnormalities and early intervention, diagnosing minor ailments, offering emotional support to patients, baring basic wounds, taking diagnostic samples, performing basic administrative functions, and rounding up suitable patients for clinical trials. Ethical tensions are presented in a way that makes the work of a modern nurse problematically complex; a range of ethical issues may conflict with the nurse's professional and personal moral systems (Mohammad et al., 2024a; Mohammad et al., 2023a; Mohammad et al, 2024b). These ethical issues can be of different natures: the conflict between patients' rights and health care interventions, the questions of euthanasia, the question of informed consent, and resource rationing.

Codes of ethics for nurse professionals guide practice so that professional nurses retain the core values of patient advocacy, integrity, dignity, and accountability. Many more guidelines exist, including the ANA and ICN guidelines that outline practice structures that, when followed, maintain frightened nursing practice to give directions to protect patient advantages. Based on this critical analysis, the ethical issues and challenges

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that define nursing practice are considered, and the effects on overall patient nursing and outcomes are highlighted.

Literature Review

Although nursing ethics is an area of specialization, it is a field in practice nursing with substantial input from philosophy, law, and the social and human sciences. Nursing ethics can be defined using ethical theories known as basic ethic theories, including deontology-duty ethic, utilitarian-outcome ethic, and virtue ethic-character ethic. The core ethical principles that guide nursing practice include:

1. Choice: valuing the rights of persons when choosing the kind of healthcare to be given.
2. Nonmaleficence: The principle asserting that one should do no harm or avoid causing harm to the patient.
3. Benevolence: The ability to act in the best interest of specific recipients; in certain cases, interventions will not harm them.
4. Justice: giving patients fair treatment by allocating services to population groups.

In nursing practice, these ethical principles must be weighed against one another since, more often than not, the practical applications of these principles come with conflicts in interest or values. That is, respecting a patient's autonomy may contradict the principle of beneficence when a nurse knows that a patient does not need treatment or the patient has refused it.

Norms of Ethical Practice are also important in formulating ethical practice through the Professional Standards of Nursing Practice. Such standards are commonly developed by the national or international nursing associations, NCSBN, ANA, and the ICN. These standards are not only the formalities of the nursing profession, which is the technical side of their work but essential aspects of morality and law that nurses are in charge of. In this case, the ANA's Code of Ethics for Nurses offers its followers nine provisions that refocus the nurse's role on people's revered rights for human dignity and social justice, besides upholding professional integrity (Mohammad et al., 2023b; Al-Hawary et al., 2020; Al-Husban et al., 2023).

Subsequently, several studies have underscored the need for nursing ethics to equip nurses with the ethical decision-making skills they need when providing nursing care. Research shows that, although nurses may be well prepared to tackle blatant ethical issues, they may feel relatively unprepared to address more complicated GCIHI and consequential ethical dilemmas, including those on end-of-life care, organ transplantation, or ethical issues arising from the increased adoptions of technologies such as AI and robotics in the healthcare facility.

Methods

This review process involved analysis of primary research, ethical theory, policy, and guidelines from best practice literature reviews. A computerized search was carried out on PubMed, CINAHL, and Scopus databases with the keywords including nursing ethics, professional or ethical, dilemma in nursing, or nursing education. To select the relevant studies, methodological criteria were used to determine the eligibility of articles about nursing ethics and professional standards. An analysis of themes that prevailed throughout the reviewed papers was done to develop nursing ethics themes, issues, and approaches to solving them.

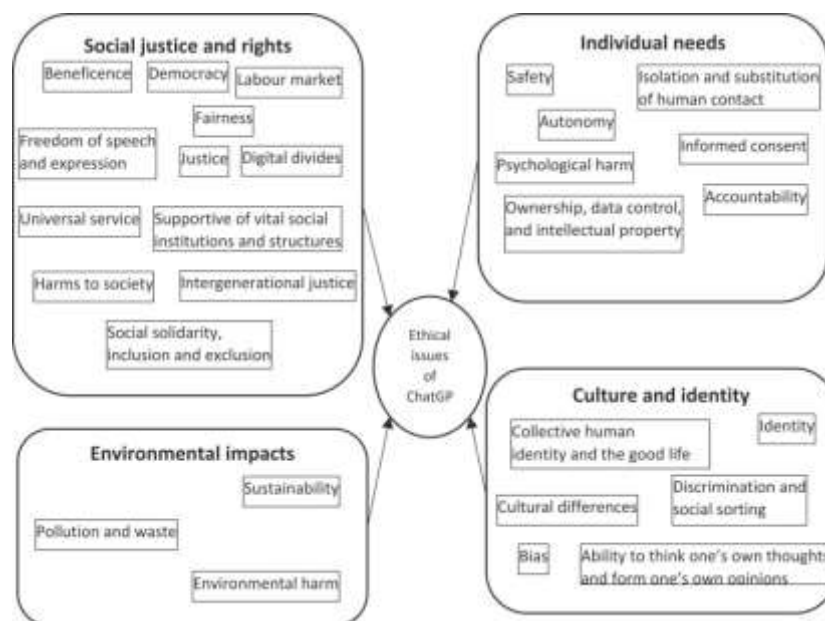
Besides, secondary data has been collected from the professional code of ethics and standardized by reputable organizations such as the ANA and ICN to support the primary finding of this research on ethical dilemmas in nursing practice. Findings were sorted by themes, for example, the principles of the professional, ethical code struggles that nurses experience when practising ethically, and the effects of ethical decision-making on patients.

Results and Findings

Ethical Dilemma in Practice: A Concept Housing the Spectrum

The findings indicate that nurses encounter ethical dilemmas across various settings, with common issues including:

1. **Patient autonomy vs medical recommendations:** Growing concerns about patient autonomy present hospice care nurses with challenging dilemmas between honouring patients' self-determination in decision-making on their treatment and adherence to best medical orders. This is especially common in cases related to patient rights, particularly when a patient will not receive treatment like hemodialysis, chemotherapy, antibiotics, or pain relief.
2. **End-of-Life Care:** Nurses are involved in decision-making related to the termination of treatment, palliative care, or hospice, which becomes a challenge when the decision is unpopular with the patient.
3. **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Respect for patients' identities is one of the most basic tenets of ethical practice in the nursing profession. However, nurses are most likely to encounter a scenario where this right is violated willingly or accidentally.
4. **Resource Allocation and Justice:** One of the most common ethical dilemmas that nurses face is the decision to prioritize a patient's need and the distribution of limited quantities of available healthcare resources, especially in periods of disasters, including viral outbreaks of various types. These decisions entail determining who gets to be attended by lifesaving organs and who does not, with relevant considerations to fairness and equity being raised.



Ethical Decision-Making

Ethical considerations in nursing practice are thus shaped by the following factors: personal moral beliefs and the policy of the health facility or institution. Research revealed that nurses use ethical theories and codes of ethics, such as ANA's Code of Ethics for Nurses. However, external pressures like time, shortage

of employees, and administrative rules and regulations may act as limitations to decision-making and compromise the issue of ethics.

Impact of Technology on Nursing Ethics

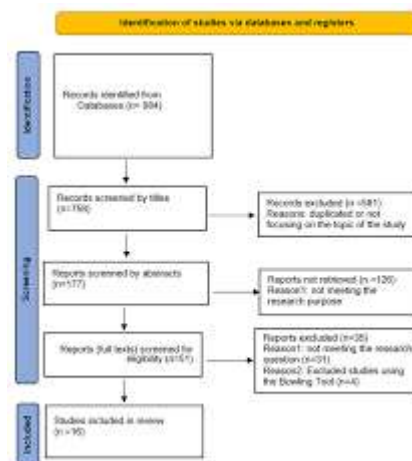
The growth of technology in the healthcare industry, such as artificial intelligence, telepharmacy, and robots in surgical procedures, among others, has presented new ethical questions to the nursing profession. The patient's rights, dignity, and issues on diverse facets of care that revolve around self-driving nursing cars remain an essential cause for concern in the existing ethical discussions. A major responsibility of nurses is to contribute to the procurement and use of technology while safeguarding patients' rights.



Discussion

Addressing Challenges in Nursing Ethics and Professional Standards: A Comprehensive Approach

It is therefore important to understand how nursing professional practice and philosophy incorporate nursing ethics and standards and vice versa in the actual healthcare delivery to the patients to protect the public's welfare in receiving healthcare. They asserted that, among all the cadres of nurses, they are the most involved in ethical practice decisions that translate to improved patient care. However, the levels of nursing practice in today's scenarios present profound ethical dilemmas. Ethical dilemmas involve working with paradoxical ethical standards, handling outside forces, including policies, governments, institutions, and other individuals, and facing the psychological implications of making tough choices. Meeting these challenges cannot be overemphasized, and nurses should practice good, ethical and humane care.

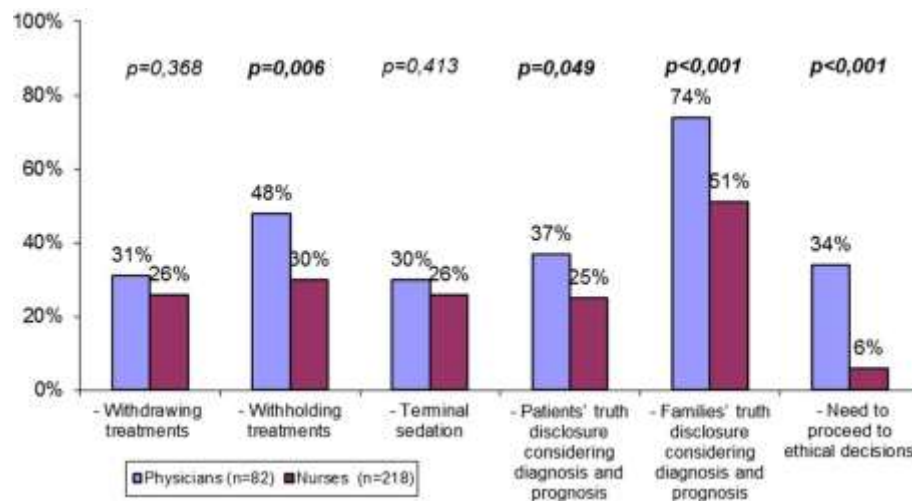


Ethical Reasoning and Decision Making in Nursing Course

It is common for nurses to make decisions involving ethical considerations that put one value against another and affect an individual patient's physical and mental well-being. Ethics in nursing is never black and white and mostly consists of deciding between the right and the right, for example, between autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, or justice.

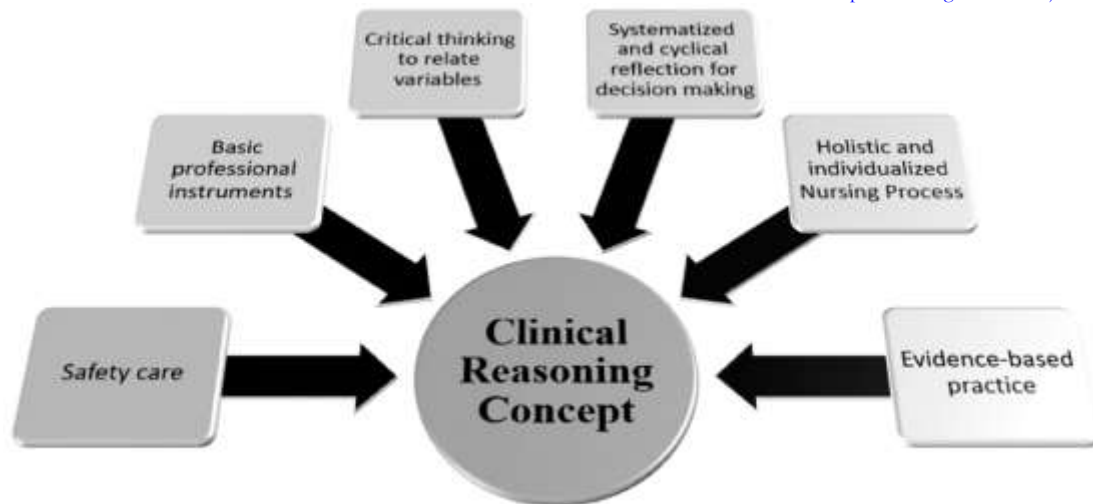
1. Autonomy vs. Beneficence: Patient self-determination—the patient's right to control his/her affairs—often may clash with the principle of beneficence, which, for a nurse, means acting in the patient's best interest. For instance, a nurse may encounter a scenario in which a patient shuns a certain treatment that the nurse feels is crucial to the patient's viability as a human being. The believed ethical obligation of the nurse is to make sure that patients understand the consequences of such decision-making and evaluate the potential harm of no treatment.

Graph 1: Impact of Ethical Decision-Making on Patient Outcomes



(Dickson & Harrington, 2017)

2. Resource Allocation and Justice: van Wyk & Esterhuizen, 2002, highlighted some of the daily ethical dilemmas that nurses encounter, and one of them was rationing of resources in that they always find themselves calling for resources that are hard to come by and then being forced to divide these among the patients. In times like culture, during pandemics, or in the resource stream when a larger number of people require these interventions, tough choices have to be made as to who will have a probability of getting the correct treatment and who will not. Such decisions are equally problematic regarding ethical concerns regarding justice and equity.
3. End-of-Life Care: The use of competent and fugitive treatment: certain non-resuscitation orders as an important area of ethical controversy in nursing. Palliative care, hospice, or end-of-life situations mean talking to the nurses regarding removing life-supporting equipment. These scenarios present ethical dilemmas for nurses because the patient and the family might be deemed to focus on their best interest in a way that might not necessarily reflect the best interest of the entire patient entity or the medical advice and decision of the clinical team and the intervention might be going to be vetoed for instrumental reasons by a bureaucratic hierarchy.



(Dickson & Harrington, 2017)

The Role of Nursing Education in Ethical Practice

Due to the peculiarity of these ethical issues, nursing education has the social responsibility of preparing nurses to manage these issues. If education is properly structured, nurses should have both theoretical and practical grounds on which they'll be able to make good ethical decisions.

1. **Ethics Education:** Teaching ethics within nursing courses is significant in equipping future nurses to encounter ethical dilemmas in their practice. Clinical competencies dominate a traditional curriculum; it is high time to emphasize ethical competencies equally considerably. Assigning examples of ethical theories, including deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, the paper explains how nurses can learn the philosophy of ethical decision-making.
2. **Case-Based Learning:** It was found that specific ethical education stations, such as case-based discussions and role-plays, are useful for teaching ethical principles and assisting learners in identifying transfers of ethical ideals from the classroom to the field. It becomes possible to let students practice ethically relevant decision-making and evaluate its potential outcomes regularly, trying to remember the moral aspect of the task or focusing on it with much more force in the next turn. Some small sample applications of the case method can be the conflict between a patient and his/her doctor regarding treatment, a situation where the patient decides not to undergo a certain procedure, an issue of organ transplant, or informed consent.
3. **Ethics Consultations and Interprofessional Collaboration:** Having repeated ethics consults, especially in difficult cases, ensures that nurses have access to a wide variety of knowledge from physicians, social workers, chaplains, and others. Collaboration with professionals of other disciplines can help enrich the decision-making process and ensure that different perspectives will be considered. The ethics competence for nurses should include the knowledge of when to refer to the ethics committees or how to discuss ethical dilemmas with others.
4. **Emotional Support and Coping Strategies:** Ethical dilemmas in nursing practice bring a lot of emotional demands into practice, management, and resolution. Professional nurses are expected to make decisions that impact patients' lives, possibly in a critical manner in cases of emergencies. Consequently, emotions inculcate stress, burnout, and moral distress from such decision-making processes. The nursing personnel, in both humanitarian and operational responses and emergencies, should have provision for counselling services, peer support, and stress reduction measures. This paper identified that to ensure that the nurses can cope with such decisions, it is

important for emotional well-being to be included in the nursing education and professional development programs.

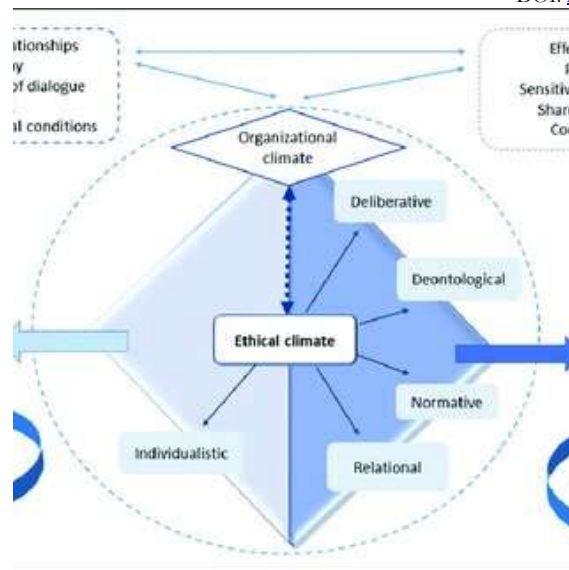


(Clifton & Cummings, 2019)

The Development of Ethical Climates in Healthcare Organizations

Therefore, there is a need for healthcare organizations to implement fully and foster ethical reflection and ethical practice. It is necessary to cultivate ethical praxis where the nurses engage in a slow, frequent, confident, and reassuring ethical demeanour consisting of ongoing ethical reflection on the action(s) and decision(s)/conclusions.

1. **Ethics Committees and Policy Development:** Attached to healthcare institutions, there should be, or if they were not formed before, the systematic formation of ethics committees for the nurses to seek help from as they grapple with ethical questions. They can help nurses in highly ethical dilemmas, inform them about institutional policies, and give ideas about ethical theories and how ethical dilemmas can be implemented practically (Clifton & Cummings, 2019; Al-Nawafah et al., 2022; Alolayyan et al., 2018).
2. **Continuous Professional Development (CPD):** These are why nurses should be encouraged to continue professional development that touches on ethics. Educational opportunities like workshops, conferences, and seminars that can be delivered through a CPD program could include issues of ethics in the changes of professional practice, like the use of artificial intelligence in the health facility, privacy of patient data, and ethics of using genetic testing.
3. **Creating a non-partisan environment for ethical discussions:** For effective communication regarding ethical dilemmas, healthcare organizations have to create an environment that does not punish whistleblowers or reporting nurses, who, most of the time, are being punished for reporting the wrongdoing conducted in their workplace. This is a good thing because it allows nurses to sit back and think about what they are doing, question when they should, and follow up on what they have done and their mistakes.

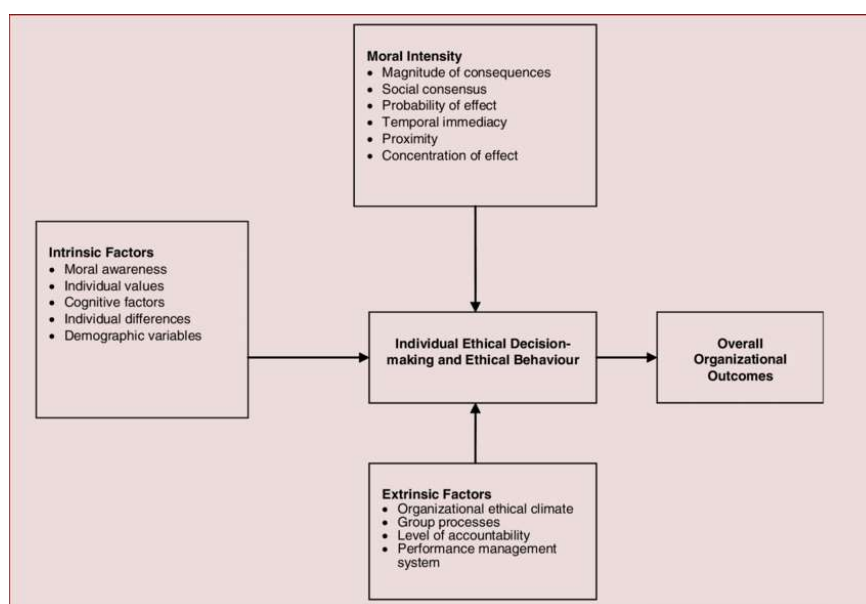


(Borton & Toffoli, 2018)

The Impact of Institutional Support on Ethical Decision-Making

The institutions support the nurses, and this will help them make ethical decisions. According to the study's findings, nurses who practice in organizations that support ethical practice initiatives and have adequate resources to support nurses in their practices during ethical dilemmas are likely to manage difficult tasks. Thus, ethical decision-making should not only be considered a matter of a certain company or person but the whole organization. Healthcare organization leaders have the responsibility of promoting ethical behaviours within their organizations by coming up with clear policies, presenting material on ethical issues, and providing nurses with the tools needed to address them (Borton & Toffoli, 2018; Alzyoud et al., 2024; Mohammad et al., 2022; Rahamneh et al., 2023).

Healthcare institutions must ensure shared governance, decision-making, policy-making and ethical standards for nurses. To ensure that nurses also work under ethical conditions, they must be empowered to be consumers and, simultaneously, participants in ethical climates of organizational work.



(Borton & Toffoli, 2018)

Every day, ethical issues arise in a nurse's practice. Still, with educational support from the nursing school, other support from our institution, and a sound ethical principle, all the challenges can be met. Nurses can be faced with the decision-making process in which they have to dispense decisions capable of defending not only the standard of professional practice but also patients' dignity and self-governance (Abood, 2016; Al-Azzam et al., 2023; Al-Shormanana et al., 2022; Al-E'wesat et al., 2024) Nursing education prepares nurses for ethical issues by using cases and students' group work, discussion of ethical issues in nursing, and support.

The institutions must, therefore, foster ethical thinking and decision-making in healthcare organizations with the necessary institutional framework structures, such as ethics committees and continuous professional development. Nursing focusing on developing an ethically supportive climate will enhance the adequacy of care and promote ethical nurse-other-support interactions in an advancing healthcare structure.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Ethical Education and Training: Nursing programs lack sufficient ethics education and should consider increasing knowledge of current and rising trends in ethical concerns, including using AI in health care.
2. Establish Support Structures for Ethical Decision-Making: Electronic supplemental databases should be formalized for healthcare institutions to establish ethics committees and the special influence of ethics education and debriefing.
3. Promote Ethical Leadership: Nurse leaders need to know that, in addition to whether knowledge will be applied to practice, they are exhibiting ethical behaviour and creating an environment for ethical practice.
4. Increase Public and Policy Awareness: Those in policy-making positions should be discussing the questions of ethics in the use of healthcare technologies and the requirement to put policies in place that will guard the patient and offer support to ethical practice (Abood, 2016).

Conclusion

Ethics and professional conduct play a central role in addressing patients with compassion and respect and in an ethical manner. Although there are a lot of issues to keep those standards in mind and due to an increased level of complexity of health care, ethical principles offer a strong base for nursing. Through sending education, promoting ethical leadership, and changing the problematic culture of healthcare organizations, the nursing profession will sustain its compassion for means of ethical care.

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