



Mini Review

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DUTY IN NURSING

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ABSTRACT

Over time, nursing practice has emerged as an independent profession based on theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and scientific justification. The professional duty of medical specialists corresponds to the rights of the patient. To be professionally responsible means to make decisions about what is good or bad, right or wrong, taking into account the final result of the actions - the greatest benefit to the patient.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this paper is to examine the ethical aspects of professional duty in the nursing profession by analyzing international and national codes of ethics.

METHODS: In order to achieve this goal, we have used general and private science methods and approaches, including documentary method, analysis and synthesis, comparative method.

RESULTS: Various nursing codes of ethics were reviewed- The Nightingale Pledge, The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses, The ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements, The Code of Professional ethics for Nurses, Midwives and Associated Medical Specialists in the Republic of Bulgaria, Guidance for good medical practice. The codes were analyzed in a comparative aspect in terms of volume, content, and practical orientation.

CONCLUSION: Codes of ethics are meaningless without professionals who are motivated to act morally in every situation containing ethical issue. Nursing students must understand their role as responsible future professionals and be familiar with the content of the Ethical code and the Guidance of good medical practice. The implementation of the ethical norms is controlled by specially formed bodies of the professional organization.

Key words: ethical codes, guidance of good medical practice, virtues, professional duty, nurse, nursing student

INTRODUCTION

MEDICAL ETHICS AND HEALTH CARE ETHICS

Medical ethics is applied normative ethics, which includes the use of universal ethical principles and rules to specific moral problems arising in medical practice in the provision of medical care and in biomedical research. The principles and rules ensure the application of humane, value and moral judgement in medical practice. (1, 2)

Over time, nursing practice has emerged as an independent profession based on theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and scientific justification. The nursing profession is diverse and responsible. (3)

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Nurses and other health care professionals face specific ethical problems. Their professional performance requires dealing with a number of different personal, interpersonal, professional, institutional, and sociocultural challenges. (4, 5) This is directly related to the place they have in relation to patients, their relatives, doctors, and other members of the medical team (6, 7) This requires them to acquire comprehensive ethical knowledge and skills in the decision-making process. (8, 9)

Health care ethics is also applied ethics and shares many of the principles and rules of medical ethics. It emphasizes relationships, human dignity, and joint patient care. Caring for the sick also includes emotional commitment, a desire to do something good for another person, responsibility, trust, devotion, and sensitivity. (10)

PROFESSIONAL DUTY

The professional duty of medical specialists corresponds to the rights of the patient.

(11, 12) In medicine, establishing a balance between rights and responsibilities is a prerequisite for a trusting relationship in the diagnostic and treatment process. (13)

In every profession, the practitioner have certain obligations to the professional class. Deontology (from the Greek *deon* - duty and *logos* - science) is the science of the duties and related rights and responsibilities of workers in practicing the profession. Medical deontology (in particular) includes the principles of medical behavior aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of medical activity and eliminating the harmful consequences of substandard work. Medical deontology provides guidelines for correct behavior in professional activity, in which complex situations, conflicts, and responsibilities arise, for the resolution of which reasoning and values alone are not sufficient. Prof. Stoicho Radanov differentiates between the concepts of ethics and deontology, emphasizing that for non-compliance with ethical norms, the punishment is a guilty conscience, and for non-compliance with deontological norms, medical workers bear legal responsibility. (14).

To act responsibly is to act freely in the name of good and right. To be professionally responsible means to make decisions about what is good or bad, right or wrong, taking into account the final result of the actions - the greatest benefit to the patient. (9, 12)

The imbalance between the rights of some and the responsibilities of others leads to ethical conflicts. Incorrectly addressing this type of problem can cause moral harm to the patient, and to the medical professional - a sense of moral distress.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to examine the ethical aspects of professional duty in the nursing profession by analyzing international and national codes of ethics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to achieve this goal, we used general and scientific methods and approaches, including the documentary method, analysis, and synthesis, comparative method, induction,

and deduction. These methods complement each other.

Various nursing codes of ethics were reviewed- The Nightingale Pledge, The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses, The ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements, The Code of Professional Ethics for Nurses, Midwives, and Associated Medical Specialists in the Republic of Bulgaria, Guidance for good medical practice. The codes were analyzed in a comparative aspect in terms of volume, content and practical orientation.

RESULTS

ETHICAL CODES IN NURSING

Health care professionals perform a variety of roles. In addition to caring for the patient (which is their main role), they educate and counsel the patient. They may also be required to perform administrative and management functions by making decisions and coordinating staff activities. (15)

The diverse functions make it imperative that every health care professional knows the rights and responsibilities he or she has as a member of the profession. One of the leading responsibilities is that the profession is practiced in accordance with the legally established framework. The most significant reflection of ethical issues in medical practice is found in official ethical codes [...], although some authors insist that the Theory of Virtues is much more suitable for nursing ethics. If the nurse does not have the necessary character qualities, the rules would not make her more ethical. (10)

The ethical codes reflect the key values and principles in a profession. In clinical practice, ethical codes are a rational control mechanism in a given group. They strengthen the moral responsibility of the medical staff. (2, 17) The purpose of codes is to clearly delineate responsibilities, not to dictate specific actions. Therefore, they correlate with professional duty.

❖ THE NIGHTINGALE PLEDGE

The Florence Nightingale Pledge was proposed by Florence Nightingale in 1910 and was first taken at the first nursing school she founded in London. (10, 16) The adoption of a code of ethics for nurses is the result of the realization of the nurse's role in the process of providing health care. Thus, more than 24 centuries after the most famous medical code of ethics, a code

of ethics for nurses was also adopted. In the nursing pledge, which is analogous to the Hippocratic Oath, the incoming nurse vows "purity and fidelity" to her profession; promises to do no harm, to divulge medical secrets, to assist the physician and to seek the welfare of the patient entrusted to her care.

❖ THE ICN CODE OF ETHICS FOR NURSES

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) was established in 1899 by nurses from the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada.

The Council is a Federation of National Nurses Associations. The International Code of Ethics for Nurses was adopted by the International Council of Nurses in 1953. As clearly seen in Florence Nightingale's Pledge, initially, the duties of the nurse were mainly related to obeying and fulfilling medical prescriptions. It was not until the 1970s that a new revision of the code emphasized the responsibility the nurse had to the patient rather than to the physician. (10)

The latest revision of the ICN Code is from 2021. The modern Code examines and regulates nurses' relationships with people; in

practice; the attitude towards the profession and collegial relationships. The guidelines that the code provides are immutable in the nursing profession. (18) B The ICN Code specifically states that it is valid for both practitioners and nursing students. „*The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses is a statement of the ethical values, responsibilities and professional accountabilities of nurses and nursing students1 that defines and guides ethical nursing practice within the different roles nurses assume.*“ “*The values and obligations expressed in this Code apply to nurses in all settings, roles and domains of practice*” The question of the responsibility of nurses, nurse leaders and nurse managers, educators and researchers is discussed, as well as the responsibility of ethical committees for the application of the Code. The purpose of the Code is to assist nurses in applying the standards in practice.

Obligations such as respect for human rights, privacy, confidentiality, equity and social justice and competence are universal. **Figure 1** presents nurses' professional values in relation to patient relations, professional relationships, global health and practice.



Figure 1. ICN Code of ethics for Nurses Professional Values (Source: International Council of Nurses (ICN))

❖ **THE ANA (AMERICAN NURSING ASSOCIATION) CODE OF ETHICS FOR NURSES WITH INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS**

In the presentation, we focused on the Code of Professional Ethics of the American Nursing Association, as one of the first ethical codes in nursing. In 1926 The American Nursing Association made its own code of ethics, which was published in the American Journal of Nursing. This first revision was not adopted. (8) ANA officially adopted its code in 1950. The current Code from 2001 (ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements) serves as the theoretical and practical foundation of nursing in the United States in expressing the "values, virtues, and duties that shape, guide, and inform nursing as a profession." In addition to general moral statements and standards, the Code contains specific guidelines for clinical practice, education and research. (Interpretive Statements). (19) Nurses in any role have a moral responsibility, not only in clinical awards. Representatives of nursing organizations have the duty to uphold the values, and integrity of the profession. Principles such as professionalism, respect, confidentiality, and beneficence are universally recognized.

❖ **CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS FOR NURSES, MIDWIVES AND ASSOCIATED MEDICAL SPECIALISTS IN BULGARIA**

In Bulgaria, the Code of Professional Ethics of Nurses, Midwives and Associate Medical Specialists has been approved on the basis of Art. 11, para. 1, item 2 of the Law on the professional Organization of Nurses, Midwives, and Associate Medical Specialists. It includes several sections that deal with the general situation, the relationship between health care professionals, the patient and his relatives; the relationship between health care professionals and each other; relationships between health care professionals and physicians, and relationships with the public. The general statements emphasize the moral qualities and role of nurses and other health care professionals. In the nurses' relationship with the patient, the principles of beneficence, harmlessness, respect for the individual, and confidentiality are laid down again. The Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals (BAHCP) supervises the

implementation of professional ethics norms through the Professional Ethics Commission of the Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals. The activity of the Committee on Professional Ethics is subject to the Rules for the Organization of the Activity of the Committee on Professional Ethics of the Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals. The Committee on Professional Ethics organizes and operates its activities in accordance with the Law on the professional organization of nurses, midwives, and associated medical professionals and the Code of Ethics. The professional ethics commission rules on compliance with professional-medical, moral-ethical, and deontological issues related to the exercise of the profession. The Committee on Professional Ethics of BAHCP consists of a chairman and 6 members, elected by name by the Congress of BAHCP for a term of 3 years. Regional commissions on professional ethics are established on a territorial basis. The commissions on professional ethics of the Regional Colleges of BAHCP consider complaints for violations under Art. 40 of the Law on the professional Organization of Nurses, Midwives, and Associate Medical Specialists. (20-22)

❖ **GUIDANCE FOR GOOD MEDICAL PRACTICE IN HEALTH CARE IN BULGARIA**

The rules of good medical practice of the various professional groups help to strengthen their professionalism; to achieve effective practice of the profession; to ensure the quality of medical services and reduce the risk for the patient. The rules of good medical practice reflect the ethical aspects and the due behavior of medical professionals. (13, 23)

The Guidance of Good Medical Practice in Health Care is intended to be valid for all health care professionals and contribute to the strengthening of their professionalism; to achieve effective practice of the profession; to ensure the quality of the health care provided and reduce the risk for the patient. The rules of good medical practice in health care reflect the ethical aspects and the proper behavior of health care professionals. Invariably, the chapters on patient relations include the duties of medical confidentiality, trust, respect for autonomy, impartiality, competence, and integrity. (23)

CONCLUSIONS

The ethical duty of nurses is described in international and national ethical codes that should be promoted and serve as a desk document in one's daily practice.

The described values and principles on which the responsibilities are based are common to the profession. In all of the codes, that were analyzed we found the principles of respect for the integrity of the person, beneficence and nonmaleficence, which are basic principles of the theory of Principlism. In Bulgaria, nursing students get to know them in the first year of their studies. In the Code of Professional Ethics of nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals in Bulgaria we do not find the obligation of students to apply the norms laid down in it, but this is implied considering their relationships with patients, relatives, and colleagues already in the training process.

When analyzing the codes, we found that some of the common duties are compassionate patient care and alleviation of suffering. The nurse's first obligation is to the patient- to support and protect him/her. Codes of ethics are meaningless without professionals who are motivated to act morally in every situation containing ethical issue. Nursing students must understand their role as responsible future professionals and be familiar with the content of the Ethical code and the Guidance of good medical practice.

The implementation of the ethical norms is controlled by specially formed bodies of the professional organization.

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