

Nursing Ethics and Theory: A Synergistic Approach to Ethical Decision-Making

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Mini Review

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Abstract

Nursing ethics and theory are the guiding lights that illuminate the moral pathways in healthcare. Ethical decision-making is the cornerstone of nursing practice, ensuring the well-being and dignity of patients. This article delves into the symbiotic relationship between nursing ethics and theory, emphasizing how this synergy equips nurses with the moral compass needed to navigate complex ethical dilemmas, ensuring that patient care is not only effective but also profoundly compassionate. Nursing ethics encompass a set of moral principles and standards that guide the behavior of nurses in their professional practice. Fundamental ethical principles in nursing include autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. Nurses adhere to these principles, ensuring that patient rights are respected and care is provided in a manner that is compassionate, safe and respectful of individual choices.

Keywords: Nursing ethics, Healthcare, Nursing theories

INTRODUCTION

Nursing theories provide a theoretical framework that encompasses the ethical dimensions of patient care. Theories such as the Theory of Care Ethics by Carol Gilligan emphasize the significance of relationships, empathy and understanding in ethical decision-making. Integrating these theories into practice equips nurses with a deeper understanding of the ethical nuances involved in patient interactions. By appreciating patients as unique individuals with complex backgrounds, emotions and beliefs, nurses can make ethical decisions that are not only rooted in principles but are also profoundly humanistic. Nursing theories highlight the importance of autonomy, acknowledging that patients have the right to make decisions about their own healthcare. When faced with ethical dilemmas, nurses, informed by nursing theories, engage patients in meaningful conversations^[1]. By understanding patient's perspectives and values, nurses can advocate for choices that align with the patient's autonomy, thereby upholding a fundamental ethical principle.

Nursing theories emphasize the concepts of caring and healing. When nurses approach patient care with a genuine sense of empathy and compassion, they are more likely to make decisions that promote the well-being of patients (beneficence) while avoiding harm (non-maleficence). Ethical decision-making, grounded in nursing theories, ensures that patient care is not only medically sound but also profoundly humane. Ethical decisions often involve considerations of fairness and justice. Nursing theories, such as the Social Justice Theory, encourage nurses to be advocates for equitable access to healthcare. When faced with dilemmas related to resource allocation or healthcare disparities, nurses, rooted in these theories, can advocate for policies and practices that promote fairness and social justice within the healthcare system. Nurses frequently encounter ethical challenges that require nuanced decision-making^[2]. Ethical dilemmas can range from issues related to end-of-life care and informed consent to concerns about patient confidentiality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nursing theories provide a structured approach to these complexities. By reflecting on the ethical dimensions of their actions and seeking guidance from theoretical frameworks, nurses can navigate these challenges with wisdom and compassion. The synergy between nursing ethics and theory forms the ethical heartbeat of nursing practice. It elevates nursing from a mere profession to a profound vocation—a calling to uphold the dignity, well-being and rights of every patient. As nurses continue to navigate the intricate web of ethical challenges, the ethical principles embedded in nursing theories serve as guiding stars, illuminating the path toward ethical decision-making^[3,4]. In this harmonious blend of ethics and theory, nurses become not just caregivers but ethical stewards, ensuring that every decision, every action and every interaction is rooted in principles that echo

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the very essence of nursing: compassion, respect and unwavering dedication to the welfare of humanity.

Ethical theories such as deontology, utilitarianism and virtue ethics provide nurses with diverse lenses through which they can approach ethical dilemmas. Deontological ethics emphasizes duty and rules, guiding nurses to make decisions based on moral obligations and professional codes of conduct. Utilitarianism focuses on the greatest good for the greatest number, challenging nurses to consider the overall consequences of their actions. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, centers on the development of moral character, encouraging nurses to embody virtues such as empathy, integrity and compassion in their decisions. By integrating these ethical theories into their practice, nurses can critically analyze ethical dilemmas from multiple perspectives, enabling them to arrive at well-considered and ethically sound decisions. Nurse leaders play a pivotal role in shaping ethical practice within healthcare institutions. Ethical leadership involves setting a positive example, fostering a culture of open communication and empowering nurses to voice ethical concerns.

DISCUSSION

Nurse leaders, informed by ethical theories, can navigate the complexities of organizational ethics, ensuring that policies and practices align with ethical principles. Ethical advocacy at the leadership level involves championing for adequate resources, safe staffing levels and ethical decision-making frameworks within healthcare organizations. By creating an ethical environment, nurse leaders facilitate a culture where ethical nursing practice is not only encouraged but also expected. The nurse-patient relationship is a sacred bond founded on trust, respect and empathy. Ethical theories and principles guide nurses in maintaining the integrity of this relationship. Informed consent, a cornerstone of ethical practice, ensures that patients are fully informed about their treatments and have the autonomy to make decisions about their care. Confidentiality, another fundamental ethical principle, guarantees that patient's private information is protected.

Empathy, deeply rooted in virtue ethics, enables nurses to understand patient's emotions and experiences, fostering a therapeutic relationship built on compassion and understanding. Through the lens of ethical theories, nurses cultivate relationships that honor patient's dignity and uphold their rights, ensuring that ethical considerations are at the forefront of every interaction^[5,6]. Ethical nursing practice is not a static concept; it requires continuous reflection, self-awareness and professional growth. Nurses must engage in ethical self-assessment, critically examining their beliefs, values and biases that may impact their decisions. Ethical theories provide frameworks for this reflection, encouraging nurses to explore the moral dimensions of their practice. Additionally, ongoing education and training in ethics enable nurses to stay updated on emerging ethical issues and dilemmas, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to address complex ethical challenges in contemporary healthcare settings.

CONCLUSION

In the intricate tapestry of nursing practice, ethical theories and principles are interwoven threads that create a fabric of integrity, compassion and moral responsibility. This synergistic approach to ethical decision-making transforms nursing from a profession into a moral calling—a commitment to the highest standards of care and the ethical principles that underpin it. As nurses continue to grapple with the complexities of healthcare, the integration of ethical theories serves as a guiding light, illuminating the ethical pathways and ensuring that every decision made, every action taken and every patient interaction reflects the profound ethical commitment of nursing. In this holistic approach, nursing ethics and theory become not just theoretical constructs but lived realities, shaping the very essence of nursing practice.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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