

Ethics in Nursing

Name

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Course

Date

### Abstract

Few professions are as completely tied to ethics as nursing. The profession is literally based on care for others who are ill and need help, so its guiding principle is completely ethical. Then, this reality is reinforced by how ethics play into every core competency of nursing. Advocacy, autonomy, and continuing education are such competencies, and each relies on the essential and ethical drive of the nurse to act in a caring, professional way. Modern codes reflect this connection, and easily take the Florence Nightingale Pledge into the modern era because ethics do not change. As the following will examine, ethics are the core of all true nursing and must be the strongest element in any nurse.

### **Ethics in Nursing**

The role of ethics in many professions is studied and applied in different ways. Businesses, for example, will create codes of conduct to assure the public that they are ethical. Other organizations such as universities and non-profits set out mission statements of their humane purposes. With nursing, however, ethics are a great deal more than an element of the profession. Ethics provides the actual foundation of nursing, and all the competencies of nursing depend upon this platform. From advocacy to the nurse's continuing education, ethics guide the work and the individual because nursing is as much a calling as it is a profession. It is work that is based on care for others, and this sets it apart from most other professions. As the following will reveal, ethics are the core of all true nursing and must be the strongest element in any nurse.

### **Discussion**

There are basic competencies of nursing that are seen as necessary. Advocacy, autonomy, and continuing education are among them. When these concepts are examined, however, it is clear that each relies on the nurse's commitment to ethics. To begin with, advocacy and ethics are powerfully connected. In fact, virtually any definition of advocacy goes to how ethics are a central part of it: "The nurse promotes, advocates for and strives to protect the health, safety, and rights of the patient" (Lachman, 2005, p. 16). What this definition states is that there is a special relationship between the nurse and the patient, and one in place because of the nurse's dedication to the patient's well-being. This then clearly indicates efforts of an ethical nature. In simple terms, ethics are generally understood to be rules of behavior in which the concerns of others are

always important. They go to behaving in ways setting the self aside for the benefit of others. Advocacy is then a perfect process of ethical conduct, as the nurse works to make the patient a priority beyond any other consideration.

The same kind of connection exists between nursing and autonomy. On one level, autonomy refers to the nurse as acting independently, and exercising individual judgment based on knowledge and experience. This in itself is ethical because it translates to a focus of care and a stronger commitment. On another level, however, autonomy in nursing also goes to respecting the autonomy of others, and particularly the patient (Butts, Rich, 2013, p. 34). This is clearly linked to advocacy and it also reflects the ethical concern for the dignity and well-being of the patient. As the nurse acts more independently, they are better able to make efforts for the other's welfare, and this is a definition of ethical conduct itself. What is then seen is that the core competencies of advocacy and autonomy both depend upon ethics as a foundation. Put another way, they each reflect ethics as the motivating force.

This connection between ethics and nursing competencies is evident elsewhere, as in continuing education. The nurse who gains as much learning as possible in nursing is the nurse better enabled to exercise the best levels of care, and this reality is written into the American Nurses Association Code. Professional nurses participate in activities that increase the profession's body of knowledge (Bosek, Savage, 2007, p. 52), and this certainly includes continuing their own educations. It may be that this is more important than ever before, in fact, because advances in modern technology create new opportunities for care, and the nurse dedicated to the patient is ethically obligated to gain

this kind of knowledge. Then, in furthering individual education, the nurse serves the profession as a whole by elevating the standard of care. This being the reality, ethics are served in every way when the nurse goes on in learning.

Ethics in nursing are then critical in every part of the profession. Nursing has always been viewed as humane work, but attaching ethical codes to it is relatively modern. This may be because the absence of such codes allows for exceptions, or those nurses who take on the work without any real feeling or commitment to it. These potentials then explain what was long seen as the ultimate code for nursing, the Florence Nightingale Pledge. That legendary nurse inspired the words, but the Pledge was written in 1893 by a nurse named Lystra Gretter. Its purpose was to reflect the Hippocratic Oath of doctors, but also to make it known that nursing involves great responsibility, and in ways not immediately obvious. For example, it is very brief and centers on the commitment to advance care for others, but it contains the important vow to keep patient and family information private (Bosek, Savage, 2007, p. 46). The modern nursing code carries this need forward, and the scope of nursing ethics is then reinforced for the modern era.

### **Conclusion**

It is easy to believe that nursing in any form must be “ethical,” but the reality is different. That is, even if the profession is based on an ethical core, it is important that all the ethics of it be established as professional principles. This in turn reinforces how professional nursing and ethical conduct are virtually one and the same. Nursing is very much a skilled profession demanding extensive knowledge and training, but it is equally

dependent on the nurse's dedication to serving others, which is ethics. This is evident in every competency of nursing, as each emphasizes concern for the patient as its primary force. Ultimately, ethics are the core of all true nursing and must be the strongest element in any nurse.

References

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