

Nursing Awareness of Ethical and Legal Issues in Critical Care Unit: Recommended Guidelines

Thesis

*Submitted for Partial Fulfillment of Requirement of
master's Degree in medical –Surgical Nursing
(Critical Care Nursing)*

By

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B.Sc. in Nursing Science

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List of abbreviations

- CCUs** : Critical care units
- COPD** : Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- CPR** : Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- DNR** : Do Not Resuscitate
- FCM** : Four Component Model
- ICNE** : International Centre of Nursing Ethics
- RN** : Registered nurse
- SD** : Standard deviation
- SPSS** : Statistical package for the social sciences.

List of Appendices

- ❖ Nurses ethical and legal questionnaire **(Appendix I)**
- ❖ Nurses ethical and legal check list **(Appendix II)**
- ❖ Pilot study **(Appendix III)**
- ❖ Recommended guidelines **(Appendix IV)**
- ❖ Protocol **(Appendix V)**

ABSTRACT

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that examines the differences between right and wrong. Simply ethics is the study of the rightness of conduct. **Aim of the study:** to assess nurses' knowledge, practice regarding ethical and legal issues in critical care unit. **Research design:** A descriptive exploratory design was utilized. **Subject:** include all available nurses working in critical care units Ain Shams University Hospitals, 40 nurses from both genders, with different ages, and at different educational levels and years of experience were selected for this study. **Tools:** (1) Nurses ethical and legal issues awareness questionnaire. (2) Ethical and legal observational checklist. **Results:** About two thirds of studied nurses had unsatisfactory level of knowledge, more than three quarters of them had unsatisfactory practice regarding ethical and legal issues in critical care units. **Conclusion:** Nurses had unsatisfactory level of knowledge and practice regarding ethical and legal issues in critical care units. There was statistically significance relation between nurses' level of knowledge about ethical and legal issues and their ethical and legal practice. **Recommendations:** Furthers studies to evaluate the reflection of educational program regarding nurses' performance & consequently on the patient outcome. The study should be replicated on large sample & in different hospitals setting in order to generalize the results.

Key words: nursing awareness, ethical and legal issues, critical care units

Introduction

Nursing ethics constitute the values and ethical principles governing nursing practice, conduct, and relationships. Code of ethics set the standard for professional conduct by acting legally, ethically and with integrity in all matters (*Basavan, 2014*).

Ethics is concerned with the norms of right and wrong, of what is thought good or bad, of ought and ought not, in respect to values and behaviors between persons. Values are at the heart of ethics; they govern how we treat each other and the systems we create to bring about the care of one another (*Berlinger, 2016*).

Ethical directives sometimes are not clearly evident, and people sometimes disagree about what is right and wrong, that lead some people to believe that ethics can be based merely on personal opinions. nurses must do more than practice ethics based simply on their personal opinions, their intuition, or the unexamined beliefs that are proposed by other people. It is important for nurses to have a basic understanding of the various concepts, principles, approaches, and theories used in ethics throughout history

and to identify and analyze ethical issues and dilemmas that are relevant to nurses in the 21st century (*Jonsen, 2016*).

Ethical decision-making is an exercise in ethical reflection, because in the process of questioning one seeks to understand values and varying perspectives on issues. Registered nurses strive to understand the meaning that these experiences hold for each person. Through questioning and understanding, it is expected that ethical actions become clearer, and possibilities for actions become reality (*Barsky, 2016*).

Law is the system of binding rules of action or conduct that governs the behavior of people in respect to relationships with others and with the government (*Gaudine, 2016*).

Nurses need to familiarize themselves with the law and legal system for several reasons. First, the law authorizes and regulates nursing practice. Nurse practice acts of the individual states describe both the activity of nurses and the boundaries of nursing. Second, the legal system control nursing actions and omissions. The profession is in a dynamic state of change (*Griffiths, 2015*).

Critical care nurses are performing complex and vital tasks; staff nurses are caring for older and sicker patients.

The nurse must have basic knowledge about law and the legal process. This knowledge will help to ensure that nurses' actions are consistent with legal principles and will help to protect them from liability. Knowledge of legal principles is a necessary component of ethical decision making; to make informed choices (*Parker, 2016*).

Critical care nurses are confronted regularly with ethical quandaries such as disputes about withdrawal of life-sustaining therapies, lack of adequate informed consent, and conflicts about access to care or resource allocation. When confronted with ethical questions, critical care nurses can enhance their personal integrity and advocacy by using a systematic framework in thinking about how to respond (*Meisel, 2016*).

Significant of the study

Since the 21st century, a big number of ethical and legal conflicts rises worldwide due to the increasing rate of unnatural deaths and ethical dilemmas in the critical care setting. Health care setting is not only having a severe shortage of trained critical care personnel in critical care units, but also forced to employ inexperienced nurses who are expected to care for critically ill patients. Insufficient knowledge can lead to patient neglect and malpractice, which in turn lead to medico-legal court cases. Therefore,

the researcher found every nurse can provide patient with nursing care but not all of them deal with patients by humanity, respect their feelings, address their desires and give them right to make decisions related to their bodies. Nurses must give priorities to these factors and release its importance as well as providing care.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to assess level of nursing awareness regarding ethical and legal issues in critical care unit through:

1. Assessing nurses' knowledge regarding ethical and legal issues in critical care unit
2. Assessing nurses' practice regarding ethical and legal issues in critical care unit.

Research questions

1. Do the nurses have adequate knowledge regarding ethical and legal issues in critical care unit?
2. Do the nurses consider ethical and legal issues during their practice in critical care unit?