

EXAMINING THE ETHICAL COMPETENCE (EC) OF NURSING STUDENTS

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Abstract. Introduction: Ethical care in nursing services is very important and professional EC in nursing ethics means nursing care based on bioethics standards. However, so far, some important questions have remained unanswered in the area of ethical care and ECs in nursing students. Nursing ethics seems to need more studies and efforts in the field of teaching this issue to achieve this. In this paper, we have tried to examine the importance and status of training nursing ECs and the barriers to their acquisition among nursing students so as to identify the challenges and needs of ethical care education to enhance the ECs of future nurses and pave the ground for further studies in this regard.

Methodology: this study used thematic qualitative content analysis. We selected 15 nursing experts and teachers and 35 nursing students as the participants by targeted sampling method and used structured interviews to collect data.

Results: The results of the study were divided into four areas after analysis including clinical environment, curriculum, teachers having scientific competence in the field of professional ethics, and motivation and interest of students in nursing profession.

Conclusion: the results showed that both background and individuals are effective in developing ECs of nursing students. Thus, the barriers to obtaining ECs should be sought in various aspects.

Keywords: Ethic, ethical competence, nursing

INTRODUCCIÓN

Ethics as a term in Farsi is the plural form of the word “mood”, so the science of studying and valuing human moods and behavior is called ethics. Different types of human behavior are formed based on two principles, nature and nurture in the community. Although genetics plays an important role in the transmission of these traits, environmental factors are the cause of the development and prosperity of any ethical feature in the environment (Horton K et al., 2007).

Ethics determines some duties for individuals to act accordingly in their lives in relation to others. In this regard, the subject of medical ethics also shows what action and under what conditions is the most appropriate action for patients. The purpose of ethics in nursing is to improve nursing care and to direct it in a direction aimed at improving the health of patients (Fitzergland L et al., 2000).

Nursing is among the sciences with many ethical aspects in the past, present, and future. Nursing ethics is a branch of medical ethics influenced by developments in this field (Memarian salsli M et al. 2007). As ethics deals with distinguishing good bad, professional ethics competence can be considered as the same to professional competence (Davis AJ et al., 2006).

One of the goals pursued by nursing education is enhancing the professional competence of nursing students. Professional competence creates a sense of power in nurses enabling them to perform their duties effectively (Dierckx De et al., 2004). Professional competence has different aspects, while ethical competence is one of the important dimensions of professional competence (Torunn BI et al., 1999).

Nowadays, nursing emphasizes practical nursing competencies, while ethical competence in care or ethics of care is sometimes neglected. The importance of care ethics is so much that it sometimes gets priority over other aspects of nursing practice. This is a logical topic for considering ethics of care will bring about the need for continuous learning and proper work (Rodeny P et al., 2002).

As the most important precondition for having ethical action is to have competencies, the owners of various health care professions, especially nurses, have shown special interest in ethical competences in recent years (Dierckx De et al., 1997). Davis et al. (2006) consider professional ethics of nurses to include ethical thinking, ethical

view, and ethical performance (Torunn BI et al., 1999).

Nursing is a profession that needs ethical knowledge, in other words; ethical competence in to guide action. A nurse in any situation and educational situation needs ethics because the results of his practice depend on his or her knowledge and ethical competence (MacIntosh J et al., 2003).

Although most nurses and nursing students are aware of the ethical aspects of what they do on a daily basis and understand their importance, the main concern is their ability to actualize ethical aspects (Woods M, 2005).

Studies have shown that nursing graduates doubt their ability to conduct nursing care correctly and ethically, acting as a stressor for them (Pine CM et al., 2000). Thus, for ethics education planning is needed to enable nursing students to qualify for ethical care (Gorgulu R et al., 2007).

Borhani et al. examined nursing students' perceptions of barriers to professional ethics and referred to eight dimensions: lack of motivation and interest in nursing professions, inadequate self-awareness, lack of expert teachers at ethical skills, improper curriculum, the use of inappropriate methods in ethics education, problems in evaluation of ethical characteristics, weakness of interpersonal communication, and constraints of clinical environment (Fagan JA, 2009).

In a review study on behavioral sciences and communication skills and ethics - with lecturing methodology on theoretical topics and the method of surface evaluation and estimation of students' short learning in nursing, medicine, dentistry and public health - Pine & Mcgoldrik have suggested performance-based approach, designing scenarios, audiovisual self-testing, cyber training and educational films, simulation models and team scenarios, and intra-group discussions and methods to solve the problem of teaching communication skills, professional ethics and patient rights (Krawczyk RM, 1997).

In addition to having appropriate functional skills, the nurses should have high potential in critical thinking, clinical decision making, clinical judgment, ethical reasoning and effective communication with the patient, all of which need effective education during their studies (Sullivan-Mann J et al., 2009).

In a qualitative study by Borhani et al. (2010), all students participating in the study considered the difference between what they learn in the educational environment and what they do in clinical settings are one of the major barriers to considering professional ethics. Non-compliance to

care principles gradually causes normalization and indifference to violations of ethicality (Numminen OH et al., 2007).

Studies in Iran, like other countries, show the fact that they experience stress and ethical tension when making ethical decisions (Neville L, 2004).

A study on the competence of professional ethics in different cultures and working conditions can provide new information in this regard. Since there have been few studies in the field of ethical competence of nursing students in Iran, this study examined the competences of professional ethics in nursing students.

METHODOLOGY

This study used thematic qualitative content analysis method. Using a targeted sampling method, we selected 15 nursing experts and instructors and 35 nursing undergraduate students from Uremia Nursing Faculty by convenience sampling from among all the students studying at the faculty, and conducted semi-structured deep interviews with them.

Coordination was done to determine the interview time with the students. The necessary information was provided to the subjects and oral consent was received from them to start the study research on the research objectives.

At the beginning of each interview, some questions were asked to familiarize the researcher with the subjects as well as to create a friendly atmosphere without stress, and then the questions became more specific and the research objectives were gone through.

The duration of each interview was an average of an hour. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. In this study, the analysis was carried out based on the following steps: immediately after each interview, its content was recorded on tape and then written. After conducting the interviews, the contents were read several times to obtain the general meaning of the students' statements in line with the research objectives. Then the units or codes were extracted and similar codes merged.

In order to ensure that data is acceptable, people who have had the experience of conducting qualitative research were asked to review the codes.

RESULTS

Using purposeful sampling method, 15 nursing experts and instructors and 35 students were included in the study, of whom 15 were male and 20 female students. Students were selected from all the academic years, except for the first and second semesters. The combination was 10 students from the second year, 15 from the third year and 10 in

the fourth year. Students' age ranges were between 20 and 25 years old.

Data analysis showed four main domains as the main methods of acquiring professional ethics in students. These areas included clinical environment, curriculum, professors having scientific competence in the field of professional ethics, and motivation and interest of students in nursing profession.

Clinical environment

One of the factors that all the students participating in the study acknowledged was the difference between theoretical lessons and practical units in clinical education environments.

One of the participants said: "Among the issues that all the teachers emphasized during the theoretical education was preserving the privacy of patients during medical procedures, whereas in the hospital it is hard to consider ethical issues of this kind due to lack of facilities."

Curriculum

Among the other areas that the students agreed upon was the importance of curriculum in enhancing students' ethical competences.

One of the students said: "During these seven semesters of studying nursing, I just witnessed repetitive issues in different curricula. In all clinical units, we are only asked repetitive questions. We have received very little information regarding ethics. Personally, I believe that there should be a course for examining ethical issues and how to deal with ethical issues."

Teachers' scientific competence in the field of professional ethics

Students believe that although their professors speak of nursing ethics during theoretical and practical training, they are not fully familiar with ethics and their knowledge is not sufficient to transfer to students. They argue that their professors do not have the ability to analyze ethical issues, and they see this as an indication of the inadequate mastery of the professors over the field of professional ethics.

One of the students said: "Most of our teachers, especially trainers pay little attention to ethical issues in clinical practice, and unfortunately, their attention is only to technical tasks, such as taking medication and taking patient's vital signs. In my opinion, this indicates that they themselves do not have a comprehensive knowledge of the basics of professional ethics."

Motivation and interest in nursing profession

One of the things most participants admitted in their statements was their motivation and interest in nursing. According to them, lack of motivation affects student learning, and inappropriate learning

can lead to mistakes in conducting bedside measures.

One of the participants said: "If a nurse does not care about his profession, it can cause harms to the patient because if we do not care about our profession, we will also neglect the patient; and if we are satisfied with our profession, we will try to do the best for the patient."

Another student said: "I think more than half of the nursing students are not interested in their work, and, of course, we will see the consequences in the future in the field of work and professional ethics."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Nursing students enter the nursing schools with a range of personal values, beliefs and ethics, some of which can be positive and some others negative. Beliefs and ethical practices are important issues for nursing educators since one of the important goals of nursing education is to educate students who have good ethical development (Kolb DA, 1984).

Moreover, it should be noted that the scope of nursing care is fraught with problems that require the adoption of ethical decisions. Today's students are tomorrow's nurses who will decide on the health and life of humans. Thus, these students must attain a suitable level of ethical competence during their studies. Studying at the university is an opportunity for students to learn and grow ethically and professionally (Karahoca A et al., 2010).

A study by Sullivan et al. (2009) showed that the use of simulated situations improves the ethical and critical thinking ability of nursing students (Lasater K, 2007).

Numminen et al. (2007) compared a group of nurses with no ethical education with the ones who did and showed that the group with education in this regard was less anxious than the ones without ethics when making ethical decisions, and ethical education was effective in ethical competence of students (Rodrigues RdCV et al., 2013).

Although individuals' motivations can be effective in learning, it is noteworthy that nursing teachers should pay attention to the diversity of individual characteristics and motivations of students and provide them with positive learning experiences (Violante MG et al., 2015).

Investing on nurses and students' ethical competence is a way to improve the quality of nursing care. Thus, the development of nursing ethics is not a secondary activity but a necessity for professional promotion and service improvement. Therefore, designing ethical development methods and structures appears to be necessary (Neville L, 2004).

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