



ETHICAL CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIAN NURSES IN DAY TO DAY PRACTICE: CAN NURSE'S AUTONOMY THE SOLUTION?

¹*Dr. Umamaheswari Pakkirisamy, ²Dr. Sudha Swamy, ³Mr. Santhanakrishnan G

¹*Principal, Nova Institute of Nursing and Paramedical Sciences, Lucknow, U.P., India (Corresponding Author)

² Associate Professor, College of Nursing Rajkiya Medical College, Orai, Jalaun, U.P., India

³ Nursing Officer, Tata Memorial Center (ACTREC), Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Abstract : Achievement of patient or client satisfaction through extraordinary treatment is the main motto of the health care delivery system. There is a huge awareness about the misconduct of health professionals among the public due to technological advancement. In India, nurses play a pivotal role in the healthcare team as a foremost member of being involved in various aspects of clinical care. They are responsible for making the most excellent decision to deliver the best treatment to the clients; it makes them face various kinds of issues that create a stressful working environment. Also, they are serving humanity by placing their lives in danger during the crisis. For example, most of Covid-19 infections of nurses were transmitted by patients in a hospital environment. Nursing ethics is the only solution to sort-out the work-related problem and improve patient satisfaction. So, nurses should have excellence in nursing ethical codes and principles and their application in clinical settings. Nurses need to analyze and resolve various ethical dilemmas encountered in clinical practice. The autonomy of nursing practice will provide a clear path to follow ethical principles. Hence, nurses have to fight to get their autonomy in practice with a shield of ethics to safeguard their clients and themselves.

Index Terms : Ethical Challenges, Indian Nurses, Autonomy, Nursing practice, Nursing Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Before the 20th century, Indian nurses were regularly young men functioning with women performing as midwives. Currently, India's nursing profession has enormous development with the excellence of education and clinical exposure to students. They are serving humanity by placing their lives in danger during the crisis, as an example, 87176 health care workers have tested positive, and 573 died for COVID-19 infection across India as of 29 August 2020, and most of these infections were transmitted by patients in a hospital environment (Sushmi Dey, 2020). So, Indian nurses require extraordinary defense and unique concern from society.

WHY DO NURSES REQUIRE ETHICS?

Nurses have an exclusive function that deals with the client's life to save the client's life or care; they have to take the various decisions on the client's benefit and hospital management where or to whom they work. Sometimes, they may be influenced or forced by other health professionals to decide on client care unwillingly, which leads them into depression, angry or loss of interest in duties. Following the code of ethics by nurses will help to maintain or run their work smoothly without erroneous. The code of nursing ethics is only a guiding strategy that explains nurses' acceptable behavior, but these credentials are not specific. So nurses have to decide for themselves.

Today, nurses are practicing in an increasingly technology-driven society. Clients expect the nurse to be friends with them on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp for health advice and follow up (Starck J and Erjavec K, 2017). Here, nurses have to focus on “high tech high touch care”. So, the nursing code of ethics is technically guiding nurses about “what to do and what not to do” (Colin L. Soskolne, 2021).

WHAT IS NURSING ETHICS?

“Ethics” is moral principles that rule people’s behavior or perform the activity. “Nursing ethics” is a branch of applied ethics that cares about activities in the field of nursing with code and principles. In ancient days, the definition of nursing included faithfulness towards physician rather than being on nurse’s conduct concerning the client and client care. In recent times, nursing ethics has shifted more towards client-centered care, which includes a nurse’s commitment to respect the rights and dignity of the client.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN NURSING

Ethical issues arise when the decision needs to be selected among more than one choice, the answers may not be exact, and the options are not ideal. The reason for ethical issues is varied account to the area; some are unaccepted hospital policy, uncooperative behaviour of peers and low image of a nurse in society. Ethical issues in the nursing practice attract more and little attention to developed and developing country respectively. The reason for ethical issues is varied account to the area; some are unaccepted hospital policy, uncooperative behaviour of peers and low image of a nurse in society (Hamid S, et al., 2016).

KINDS OF ETHICAL ISSUES

Honesty and withholding information:

According to the patient’s rights law, they have the right to know their health condition. But in some situations, family members may don’t want to expose the disease condition to the patient to protect from stress due to terminal illness. This is the kind of stress-producing situation to nurse also, because, if she tells the patient, patient may suffer in his remaining days and if she did not disclose the truth, he might live his remaining days with cheerfulness, but according to nurse consciousness it’s against ethics (UW medicine, 2021).

Science and culture:

The health care industry is based on science technology. Also, various nursing care literature says that, the nurse has to give culturally congruent care, means giving nursing care according to the client’s cultural preference, because disease and treatment are embedded deeply with cultural beliefs and values. Here, the nurse is in an ethical dilemma to choose between forcefully acting on nursing care to save the patient or leaving the patient to suffer due to his cultural satisfaction (Duquesne University, 2020).

Health care need, cost and resource allocation:

The health care cost is increasing every part of the world and even people think that they will get the best treatment with only high cost. One of the nurse’s important duties is cost containment of the client, but, she does not have the freedom to act upon that, for example, IV cannulas are available from various costs; the nurse has to choose according to the client’s economic status. But in a practical situation, she has no autonomy to choose that even. So, she has to follow the hospital policy, which is against nursing ethics (Rose O. Sherman, 2012).

Autonomy and beneficence:

The nurse has to put a preference in all aspects of the patient’s beneficence. Still, sometimes, a patient used to oppose the nurse’s beneficiary action with the name of the patient’s autonomy. For example, the patient may refuse to take prescribed medicine, because, a patient has a right to refuse all medical care. The nurse has to face the ethical issue at this time because the nurse’s autonomy is questioned (Duquesne University, 2020).

ETHICAL ISSUES FACING BY INDIAN NURSES

India is loaded with full of customs and traditions, here, nurses have to deal with a variety of clients who are having a different kind of religion, caste, languages and culture. So, Indian nurses have to adapt to a variety of ethical environment to cherish the client. Here, nurses are expected to satisfy not only the client also the management people and seniors which gives challenges at the workplace (Maureen Mayhew, 2018).

Mostly, nurses are withholding the information because; they are just following the order of the physician, so they don’t have the autonomy, to be honest with the patient. And also historically, nurses were not assigned for direct legal responsibilities regarding disclosure of information necessary to enable a patient to evaluate a proposed procedure (Hamid S, 2016).

According to Indian tradition, all major decisions will be taken by a powerful male of the family. So, the nurse has to focus mainly on him while taking concern of procedure for even adult female client which delay the treatment. After treating the client with dignity, nurses are blamed by the clients for unnecessary reasons which cause major ethical issues for nurses (Maureen Mayhew, 2018).

India's health care system is developed well comparing to the last century, even though, some areas are lacking to provide optimal service to people, here, nurses used to facing some kind of ethical issues. Nurses don't have any freedom for independent practice and even they don't prefer complete autonomy, because, if a patient develops any complication, nurses have to face all the consequences alone which create ethical issues (Dr. Laxmi Verma and Dr Dhananjay Srivastava, 2018). The main reason for arising ethical issues are poor teamwork, inequitable workload, the poor value of the nursing profession, conflict in hospital protocol, conflict in informed and voluntary consent, false accusations by patients, deficiency in amenities, patient's expectations and cultural barriers (Hamid S, 2016).

AUTONOMY IN NURSING

Autonomy in nursing refers to the nurse's ability to act according to own knowledge and judgment, providing nursing care within the full scope of practice as defined by existing professional, regulatory and organizational rules (Pesut B, et al., 2012). The nurse has autonomy when she can control the knowledge needed to make the decision. She or he does not need to act for other's wish and no one is "above" the nurse to get approval or permission to take action. If an act requires permission or approval from someone else, then, the act is not flexible and the nurse is not acting with autonomy. For example, a nurse can decide to give health teaching regarding hypertension dietary management to hypertensive patient and no one needs to permit to do this education to nurse.

A nurse is working and staying twenty-four hours per day with the client, she is the only and first person to attend emergency care. Therefore, nurse's license law and agency pose an important role in defining nurse's autonomy, it has to give a clear cut idea for the level of nurse's autonomy during the time in which the presence and absence of a physician (Jamie Murphy, 2021).

Nurses can do function collaboratively with physicians by maintaining autonomy with a full scope of practice. Furthermore, autonomy does not cause disharmony with physicians or senior nurse. Nurses have to give importance to both roles like a collaborator with physicians and autonomous nurse. Because the journey of an autonomous nurse is not a solo journey; it is a journey of nurses with physicians and health care agencies (Papathanassoglou ED, et al., 2012).

The nurse's autonomy is in the hand of nurses, so she has to improve the communication skill to converse the information to her client and also co-workers. The nurse administrators should act as a role model and mentor to Novice.

NURSE'S AUTONOMY IN INDIA

Traditionally the nature of work of nurses in India accepted as a low value because it was considered a menial work and occupation-based hierarchical framework. A social attitude towards nursing is not a very respectable job due to tasks of dealing with unclean substances and bodily work with all sorts of peoples (Oddvar Hollup, 2022). But, now a day, some efficient nurses are striving to uphold the standard of nursing care and image in India. To achieve this goal, become a nurse with autonomy is the first step by nurses (Flaubert JL, et al., 2021).

Indian nurses are partially or sometimes completely controlled and guided by others including the physician, management, co-workers and even senior nurses. They are independent to do all basic nursing care like checking of vital signs, bed making, etc. but they are not allowed to do some advanced nursing care without prior permission of the physician (Rao AD, et al., 2017). India is the only country where a nurse who has worked in the ICU for 20 years legally not allowed for prescribing simple painkillers or giving an injection without the presence of a doctor (Dureja GP, et al., 2017).

The shocking fact that there are just 1.7 nurses per 1000 people in India, below the minimum of three recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), is revealed by data from the Union Health Ministry. Despite having 2.34 million registered nurses and midwives, India still lacks 1.94 million nurses, according to data from the Indian Nursing Council (Asha Mary Reji, May 31, 2021). So it may be one of the reasons for nurse's inability to maintain an autonomous practice in nursing care, because of less time, they used to perform the nursing care which physician ordered (Chhugani M, James MM, 2017).

To improve the autonomy in the nursing field, they have to get a chance to convey their opinion about patient care. Higher nursing officials and physicians have to address inappropriate actions by using constructive feedback to guide autonomous nursing practice (Rouhi-Balasi L, 2020). An administrative pattern of a hospital in India has to modify to support the climate which can enhance the nursing autonomy.

Authorities of the nursing education system of India should take an effective step to produce well efficient nurse to follow autonomy in practice. Indian nurses are requiring additional training and qualification to work as an independent professional (Putturaj M and Prashanth NS, 2017).

Most of the nurses are thinking that they are not having the freedom to act compared to other countries due to the pressure of physician, but they have to understand that, collaboration with physicians also works very well with autonomy in nursing, no need to take permission for providing own nursing care (Papathanassoglou, E.,2012). Implementation of nurse centric, physician guided healthcare model in which nurse and physicians works as a team. Nurse also gets autonomy and is a part of decision making. Workload balance: Removal of redundant & non-productive tasks from the lists of jobs assigned to nurses to give them more time for patient engagement. Also providing them with incentives and rewards time to time. Nurses should be seen as leaders & administrators, they should be provided with Finance & management training. Providing technology to support the nurses for the requisite clinical support and inventory backup. The health ministry and the Indian Nursing Council should create specialists courses to train nurse practitioners, nurse intensivists and nurse anesthetists. This will enable them to earn higher salaries to prevent their attrition to West countries (Dr. Laxmi Verma, Dr Dhananjay Srivastava, 2018).

Recently, the idea of nurses practicing independently has been gaining attention in Indian health policy circles and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is considering the introduction of independent nurse practitioners in primary healthcare. Also, Government of India continuously supports the Indian nurses to work free from stress in health sector by introducing new policy and regulations and providing facilities with great difficulty with having huge population (Putturaj M, et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

The nursing field is undergoing a lot of pressure in many countries including India. Here, nursing ethics is playing a very imperative role by giving the best solution to the worst problem. The goal of nursing ethics can be achieved when nurses have their autonomy in practice. In conclusion, nurses have to fight to get their autonomy in practice with the shield of ethics to safeguard herself and her client.

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