

The Challenges of Implementation of Professional Ethics Standards in Clinical Care from the viewpoint of Nursing Students and Nurses

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Observing the professional ethics in providing nursing care is an inseparable part of this profession as overstepping it influences patient satisfaction and recovery, quality of care, standards of nursing care and promotion of occupation. Therefore, this study was conducted aiming to determine the barriers of observance of professional ethics standards in clinical care from the viewpoint of nursing students and nurses.

Methods: In this descriptive cross-sectional study, viewpoints of 180 nurses and nursing students of Abadan Faculty of Medical Sciences regarding the barriers of observance of professional ethics standards in clinical environment were collected using demographic information questionnaire and barriers of observance of professional ethics criteria in three domains including Managerial, environmental and individual care were collected and analyzed using SPSS software.

Results: In both groups of nursing students and nurses, the highest average of management, environmental, and personal care services area are related to the environmental domain ($p < 0.005$).

Conclusion: Observance of the professional ethics standards in nursing practice, especially factors related to environmental dimension which is one of the most important barriers to professional ethics, can play an important role in improving and restoring the health of patients. Therefore, the management system and health system managers can play effective roles in observance of the best criteria of professional ethics through accurate planning and providing human resources and improving the conditions of service for medical personnel, including improving the conditions of sectors and satisfying their expectations in different fields.

Key words: Nursing Ethics, Clinical Care, Nursing Students, Nurses

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Research Questions

Adherence to professional ethics in the provision of nursing care has always been emphasized. But it seems that due to the changing viewpoints on health and changes in the health system, the ethical approach in healthcare professions has changed from a request and recommendation to an undeniable necessity (1). Nursing ethics is the observance of professional ethics in the provision of nursing care and also the inseparable part of the nursing profession (2). Any nursing ethical impairment can affect the most scientific and best nursing care (3). Nurses are responsible for caring for the patients as members of the healthcare team. Members of this team spend a lot of time with the clients and have a lot of contact with them due to the nature of their work. Therefore, care involves human and moral relationships as the central concept of nursing. Caring for the clients in all its dimensions has an ethical nature, so that the subject of ethics and nursing are thought to be two basic elements, and historically, nursing is one of the first professions that have addressed ethical issues (4).

Many years have passed from establishment of the codes of ethics for the nursing profession, which shows the importance of ethics as one of the main elements of this field (4). However, the issue of ethics and ethical competence of nurses still maintains its importance in various educational, management and research dimensions. In other words, the establishment of codes of ethics alone cannot provide the necessary moral excellence in the various dimensions of nursing services. Many nurses consider ethical codes of professional ethics in regard to ethical issues, but do nothing about it.

In many cases, they do not have enough power and support to show their reaction, and sometimes they do not know what to do (6). The results of studies in the field of ethics indicate weakness in the ethical decision-making of nurses (7). Zirak et al. in their research stated that only about half of the students are at an acceptable level of moral development (8). According to the studies, the average score of moral reasoning in nurses abroad was 51.74 and in Iran was 42/16 (9). Sokhanvar states that "The rate of observance of ethical principles in clinical decision making is not desirable, and nurses have no ability to apply ethical knowledge in the real environment." Therefore, it is necessary to monitor the rate of observance of nursing ethics codes from the source of nursing ethics education, that is, nursing schools, in order to determine the extent to which students have weaknesses so that nursing managers provide more complete education in that dimension. The importance of nursing schools in nursing ethics education is as extent as Kelly in his research concluded that colleges are the most influential force in shaping ethics in nursing students (10). The results of a study in 2007 on the study of nursing ethics training in Turkey revealed that inappropriateness of the trained teaching methods of ethics and ethical content is one of the most important barriers to the development of nursing students' abilities to deal with ethical issues (11).

Borhani et al, reviewed the perception of nursing students about the barriers to professional ethics. In their results, they referred to eight themes: lack of motivation and interest in nursing profession, inadequate self-awareness, lack of ethics teachers, lack of curriculum, using inappropriate methods in ethics training, ethical evaluation problems, weakness of interpersonal communication, and constraints of clinical environment (12).

Most nurses agree with each other and their viewpoint is that they have some barriers to ethical performance in their work environment that disturbs their ability to provide competent and quality care [13]. Lack of observance of the professional ethics in the health system by nurses affects patient satisfaction and recovery, quality of care, nursing care standards and promotion of care (14). Researchers have also considered moral sensitivity to be influenced by the education, culture, religion, education, and life experiences of individuals (15). Naturally, cultural contexts influence the crucial issues of moral sensitivity. Accordingly, barriers are no exception to this rule. Therefore, multiple studies in different societies have led to the recognition of different aspects of moral sensitivity (16). However, due to the lack of studies on the barriers of professional ethics in nursing performance and since one of the important achievements of codes of ethics is the facilitation of the implementation of clinical governance, which involves taking actions to minimize the risk for employees and patients, paying attention to patient complaints and using the best evidence available in clinical decision making (17), and also, identification of ethical barriers and appropriate ethical decision making leads to positive psychological responses such as satisfaction, increased motivation and sense of competence in nurses and patients (18). The aim of this study was to determine the barriers of observance of professional ethics standards in clinical care from the viewpoint of nursing students and nurses. It seems that a comprehensive view of this important issue can be valuable.

Materials and Methods

The present study is a cross-sectional descriptive study. The research population includes full-time nurses occupied in Abadan Faculty of Medical Sciences and nursing students of Abadan Faculty of Medical Sciences who have inclusion criteria such as the baccalaureate degree in nursing, employment in one of the Internal surgical departments, at least six months of working experience, lack of responsibility at managerial posts, for nurses and students who have at least the first year of study. Sampling was conducted as a convenience sample from a total of 180 students and nurses participating in the study. After obtaining the necessary permission, the questionnaires were distributed by the researcher through the expression of the goals of the research and obtaining informed consent and frequent attendance at the appropriate time. It should be noted that the subjects completed the questionnaire freely and without direct supervision, and then the completed questionnaires were collected simultaneously by the researcher.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections: demographic information and barriers to observance of the professional ethics criteria in three areas of management, environment and personal care. Demographic data including age, gender, place name and work experience, and questionnaire of evaluation of the barriers of the observance of professional ethics criteria including 33 questions (14 questions related to the management domain, 5 questions related to environmental domain, 14 questions related to the field of care). Items were answered with a five-point scale. Selection of the options of "I totally agree" or "I agree" indi-

cates that the raised item is a barrier to the observance of professional ethics standards. Selection of "I am opposite" option indicates that the raised item does not impede the observance of professional ethics standards from nurses' viewpoint. Selection of the "I have no idea" option indicates that the lack of knowledge of the effect of the variable (question) in question is inadequate to professional ethics. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire has been calculated by Dehghani et al. (19) (89).

Results

The demographic variables included: age, gender, and work record, and the results are presented in Table 1. The average age was 377/4 227/24.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of demographic variables

		Frequency	Frequency percentage
Gender	female	115	64/2
	male	64	35/8
Work experience	Less than 5 years	123	75/9
	5-10years	26	16/0
	11-15 years	6	3/7
	More than 15 years	7	4/3

Comparison of the barriers of the observance of the standards of professional ethics in clinical care from the viewpoint of nursing students with nurses of the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Abadan are presented in Table 2. Due to the normal or non-normal distribution of the sample, the appropriate test was used.

Table 2: Comparison of the barriers of observance of the Professional Ethics Standards in General and on the basis of the areas (Managerial, Environmental, Individual Behaviors) in Clinical Care from the viewpoint of nursing students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Abadan

Variable	Classification	Mean	Standard deviation	Statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
** Total	Nurses	3 /6454	0 /62755	3035 /500	-	0 /019
	Nursing student	3 /8128	0 /60390			
** Managerial	Nurses	3 /4511	0 /81429	2732 /000	-	0 /001
	Nursing student	3 /7976	0 /66657			
Environmental **	Nurses	4 /2848	0 /64769	3053 /500	-	0 /022
	Nursing student	4 /0486	0 /73816			
Individual * Behaviors	Nurses	3 /6110	0 /70662	-1 /338	178	0 /183
	Nursing student	3 /7432	0 /56897			

* Both groups are normal and the use the independent T- test

** At least one group is not normal and the use of Mann-Whitney test

Comparison of the viewpoints of nursing students and nurses on three areas including managerial, environmental, and individual with regard to the non-normal distribution of managerial and environmental domains was conducted using Kruskal-Wallis test and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of Managerial, Environmental, and Individual Behaviors Barriers Observing Professional Ethics Standards in Clinical Care from the Viewpoint of nursing students and nurses of the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Abadan

Variable	Classification	Mean	Standard deviation	Statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
Nurses	Managerial	3/4511	0/81429	47/197	2	0/000
	Environmental	4/2848	0/64769			
	Individual Behaviors	3/6110	0/70662			
Nursing student	Managerial	3/7976	0/66657	17/409	2	0/000
	Environmental	4/0486	0/73816			
	Individual Behaviors	3/7432	0/56897			

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a view of barriers of observance of the professional ethics standards from the viewpoint of nursing students and nurses in three areas of managerial, environmental and individual care.

In both groups of nursing students and nurses, the highest average was related to the environmental area. The lack of proper facilities and equipment in the department, biological changes in the body during night shift, crowding, shift work, unexpected expectations of patients and their companions from nursing staff are involved among the factors related to this area. Naturally, an environment organized in accordance with the standards of care provides the initial conditions for ethical work. Although, for most nurses, care for patients is not very important, sometimes clinical environments that do not have standards of care have a negative effect on their performance and their care of the patient (21, 20). Meanwhile, Schluter also emphasized the role of these factors as barriers of achievement of professional ethics standards (22). Bennet et al. (2008) point out crowding as the main barrier for nurses in applying research evidence and observance of the professional ethics in care (23). Dierckx in a study on the management of the American Nurses Association pointed to the environmental factors such as lack of nursing staff, high workload, insufficient time, and financial and organizational constraints from nurses' viewpoints as important barriers of the lack of observance of professional ethics.

One of the other important barriers of observance of professional ethics in this study is the lack of experience of educators in ethical and legal issues in nursing education, which is one of the management factors. Borhani et al in a qualitative study on the students revealed the role of these factors as the top barriers to achieving professional ethics standards (12). The results of a study in 2007 in nursing ethics in Turkey also suggest the inappropriateness of teaching methods of ethics and ethical content as one of

the most important barriers to develop abilities of nursing students to deal with ethical issues (11) while Nasiriani and his colleagues have also confirmed this (22). Health care organizations can familiarize the nurses with the principles and standards of care, the importance of observance of professional ethics in improving patients' conditions and disadvantages of lack of observance of the ethics in therapeutic systems using appropriate and practical training. Applicable training and expressing concrete examples in this field as well as teaching time management, along with direct monitoring of clinical interventions, can help remove the barriers.

From the viewpoint of nurses, they have higher average score in terms of the importance of different areas in implementing environmental ethical standards. In the case of nurses participating in the present research, the role of a managerial area has been highlighted (19).

Based on the results of this study and considering the necessity of observance of professional ethics standards in nursing practice, which can play a significant role in improving and restoring health of patients, and that all factors, especially factors related to environmental dimensions, are the most important barriers to observance of ethics Professionals from the viewpoint of nurses were referred. The management system and managers of the health system can study the status quo and barriers to professional ethics through periodic reviews of professional ethics from the point of view of nurses and patients. Also, by carefully planning and providing human resources and improving the conditions of service for medical personnel, including improving the conditions of the departments and satisfying their expectations in various fields such as adequate rest, income adequacy, proper shifts, standard equipment, and emphasis on compliance Principles and standards of care by removing these barriers provide an effective step to better observe the standards of professional ethics.

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