

ETHICAL VIRTUES IN NURSING PRACTICE

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Abstract: The practice of the medical profession requires the individual to adhere to norms and principles of a certain morality, imperative for all times and eras. Ethical virtues are the basis of the professional and human behavior of the nurse. They determine the way in which the nurse communicates with patients, colleagues and society, and ensure that the care provided is not only competent, but also morally responsible.

Purpose: The purpose of this publication is to study and investigate the ethical virtues, which are of importance and application in nursing practice, because they are the basis of their professional behavior and manifestation of duty to patients, colleagues and society.

Methodology: To achieve the goal, general scientific and private scientific methods and approaches were used, including documentary method, literature review, analysis and synthesis, comparative analysis.

Results: The profession of nurses, midwives and other health care professionals is based on a set of virtues. They are fundamental moral qualities that encourage ethical and responsible behavior. These inner attitudes shape the character of the nurse and transform the profession not only into a science and practice, but also into an expression of moral responsibility and humanity. Based on the analysis of ethical virtues in nursing practice, we have divided them into three groups - personal, professional and social. Their distribution into these three groups is conditional, because in most cases they are interconnected, could be replaced with each other and are complemented. In this way we understand that they are important both for the nurses' individual development and for the social well-being of the profession. An analysis of ethical virtues has shown that their application in nursing practice is associated with a number of advantages in the relationship between nurse and patient, which is important not only for transmitting information and making ethical and autonomous decisions, but also for improving the psychological attitude of the patient. The nursing profession is communicative, and this requires these skills to be developed and maintained with conscious efforts and periodic reassessments.

Conclusion: All people deserve fair, competent and high-quality medical services and health care. The health professional-patient relationship is a key element in practice and depends on various ethical virtues, built on a foundation of mutual trust, truthfulness, integrity, respect and humaneness in health care. These are interconnected and are the basis of professionalism and good nursing practice.

Ethical virtues in nursing practice are internal attitudes that shape the character of the nurse. They give meaning to the profession and transform it not only into science and practice, but also into an expression of moral responsibility and humanity. The nurse who possesses these virtues not only provides care, but also inspires hope, peace and dignity in every patient.

Keywords: nursing ethics, ethical virtues, moral responsibility, patient-nurse relationship

1. INTRODUCTION

The literal translation of the word *virtue* is moral excellence. It is defined as a quality or characteristic that is considered morally good and desirable for an individual. It includes ethical behavior like courage, honesty or doing the right thing that contributes to the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

Ethics accompany and surround our daily lives throughout our lives. Ethical virtues are the basis of our human performance. But they are also an essential part of the professional attitude of all healthcare workers, including healthcare professionals as nurses, midwives, etc. Moral philosophical positions and professional values have been shown to influence nurses' practice behaviours [2].

Professional values are emphasized as a guiding tool for nursing to adapt to the changing world today and in the future, to improve its current status and to improve the quality of care [3]. The professional values of nurses form the foundation of nursing practice, setting the standard for appropriate interactions with patients and colleagues, and

providing a framework for professional behavior. Professional care and treatment of patients require not only knowledge, skills, and guidelines but also ethical orientations, values, and beliefs. In nursing, professional and ethical values interact to ensure the best possible care for patients [1].

The modern nursing profession is based not only on theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of medicine and healthcare. The development and application of ethical virtues in the daily activities of healthcare professionals plays a major role [11]. The practice of the medical profession requires the individual to adhere to norms and principles of a certain morality, imperative for all times and eras: humanity, empathy, loyalty, mercy, etc. They are not a matter of personal opinion or attitude, but the basis of healing activity, enshrined in the doctor's oath, the nursing pledge, and in various ethical codes.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this publication is to study and explore the ethical virtues that have significance and application in nursing practice, because they are the basis of their professional behavior and manifestation of duty to patients, colleagues, and society.

3. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the goal, general scientific and specific scientific methods and approaches were used, including documentary method, analysis and synthesis, and comparative analysis.

The literature review was carried out in 2025 to determine ethical values in nursing practice. A review of the literature enables us to use the overall results and experiences reflected in the analysis. These findings provide adequate and appropriate evidence to reach an integrated definition of ethical values in nursing considering personal, professional and social groups.

4. RESULTS

The profession of nurses, midwives and other health care professionals is based on a set of virtues. They are fundamental moral qualities that promote ethical and responsible behavior. And they are important both for their individual development and for the social well-being of the profession. Developing and maintaining virtues is key to achieving personal and public ethics. Professional values and ethical issues are closely intertwined concepts [5]. We can say that the qualities of a person represent their values translated into actions.

Despite the large number of ethical virtues, we will list some that are considered inherent to the nursing profession, namely: competence, charity, dedication, altruism, reliability, integrity, conscientiousness, intelligence, resourcefulness, justice, humility, courage, etc. It is difficult to list and analyze all the virtues in medicine. But we should note that no classification has been developed based on their importance, nor have mandatory virtues been defined that workers need to possess.

In order to more clearly present the analysis of some basic ethical virtues in nursing practice, we have divided them into three groups:

- personal;
- professional;
- social.

Their distribution into these three groups is conditional, because they are interconnected, could be replaced with each other and are complemented.

Personal ethical virtues

This group includes personal characteristics, moral qualities and virtues of the individual, which are related to his behavior, thinking and attitude towards others. We say that they are part of the essence of a human being or internal. We will consider compassion, empathy, courage, mercy, etc.

A number of authors associate **compassion** with co-experiencing another's suffering, the desire to alleviate it and improve the well-being of patients. It is an expression of love, sympathy, altruism and care for others. **Empathy** is a person's ability to understand the emotions, feelings, thoughts and physical condition of others, while also showing a desire to help them. Its manifestation is strictly individual, and there are different ways of expressing it - cognitive, emotional, intellectual. It is the basis of constructive social communication and leads to the formation of altruistic behavior.

Another important virtue related to the personality of a health care professional is **courage**. It is the ability of an individual to face fears, dangers or difficulties with determination and confidence. It is important in advocating for patients and dealing with crisis situations in practice. Nurses are often faced with complex cases and have to make difficult decisions [7]. Healthcare workers must protect the rights and interests of their patients, including when this requires confronting colleagues, administration or other healthcare professionals.

Mercy is associated with selfless love and a desire to help those in need and in trouble. We can say that it is a universal human value that commands self-denial, respect for others and the manifestation of kindness. The word itself is rooted in the Latin *merces* (wages/price). It is characterized by self-denial, the rejection of selfish and vain self-sufficiency. The family is the first place where this value is taught. And then each individual affirms mercy in his value system according to the chosen life path. The virtue includes emotional and spiritual support. This quality is especially valued and applicable in nursing practice, because it is expressed in the need to provide assistance to the injured, sick or people in trouble. Its manifestation has a positive impact on both those who receive help and those who provide it, strengthening the community and promoting mutual respect and empathy.

The manifestation of empathy, selflessness and willingness to help in nursing practice is based on **altruism**. It is a fundamental virtue that encourages health professionals to show concern, to put the well-being and needs of others before their own interests. Pure altruism consists of sacrificing something for someone else without expecting anything in return. It supports ethical and effective patient care. It improves the quality of medical services, builds trust and creates a supportive work environment. For nurses, its manifestation leads to personal and professional satisfaction, while making a significant difference in the lives of their patients.

Professional ethical virtues

In the process of nurses' work, a number of moral values, norms, principles and ethical virtues are established that correspond to the professional behavior, duty and responsibility in the practice of healthcare professionals. There are different factors that could influence the professional values. Identifying how professional values development affects the nursing profession and nurses' working circumstances is thus critical to enhancing the nursing profession and its attendant working conditions [4]. Therefore, the study, analysis and development of professional ethical qualities is a fundamental element of the training and practice of every nurse.

One of the most important professional and ethical principles in nursing practice is **competence**. It is associated with knowledge, skills, experience, behavior and moral qualities that allow the nurse to perform her duties effectively, responsibly and in accordance with professional standards. A competent nurse not only performs procedures correctly, but also realizes the moral and human value of her work.

Care is an ethical virtue that is associated with the skills of healthcare professionals to show kindness and attention to the needs and desires of others [10]. It is manifested through attention to small details that can be of great importance for the comfort and well-being of patients. This includes checking the condition of the patients, monitoring symptoms and carefully implementing the prescribed procedures. It helps patients feel respected and valued as individuals. It is associated with empathy, compassion, attention to detail, support and an individual approach to each patient.

One of the most complex concepts that people use is **justice**. We say that it is a universal criterion for evaluating all other phenomena. It is found in various areas of life. It is used to characterize human decisions, actions and activities, as well as human-created orders, customs, norms, rules, laws and regulations. A nurse must provide the same quality of care and attention to everyone, without prejudice or personal sympathies. It is also expressed in compliance with professional and ethical standards, protection of the patient's rights and respect for his dignity. Justice in nursing practice means acting honestly, impartially and with respect for every person.

Another important virtue is **responsibility**. It is a sense of duty, of a commitment, of fulfilling an obligation. Responsibility for health is shared between the patient and the medical staff. Their rights, responsibilities and obligations are interrelated, because each right of the patient corresponds to a certain deontological obligation of medical staff. And vice versa – every right of workers corresponds to an obligation of patients. This determines the social role, position and behavior of individuals regarding their responsibility for health.

Humility is understood as the ability of an individual to acknowledge their own limitations and mistakes, as well as respect for others. It includes the awareness and acceptance that people are not competent in all matters, there could be limitations and gaps in knowledge, and that the nurse may need help or advice. Healthcare professionals who have a sense of humility are willing to learn throughout their working lives. They accept criticism and feedback as an opportunity for growth and improvement, not as a personal attack. This attitude supports professional development, teamwork, and leads to better patient care.

Social ethical virtues

Social ethical virtues are manifested in the relationships of healthcare professionals with patients, their relatives, colleagues and society as a whole. They show the ability of workers to communicate. Ethical communication is of paramount importance for all professionals in the healthcare system. Ethical behavior and attitude are important for ensuring relationships in medical practice. These ethical virtues express the nurse's ability to communicate, collaborate and build trust, while maintaining humanity and professionalism. Some of the most important in this regard are: truth-telling, integrity and confidentiality.

Veracity when communicating with others is an essential and morally necessary part of the overall healing process. It is sometimes seen as a difficult ethical virtue in medical practice. It requires workers to be completely honest with patients, that is, to tell the truth, even in cases where it may cause suffering and pain. Truthfulness in nursing requires nurses and other healthcare professionals to be honest in their relationships with patients and colleagues. It means that practitioners are willing to provide patients with facts, not false assurances. It is a concept through which they show themselves and others that they are responsible and demonstrate competent care directed at those in need. On the other hand, patients are also expected to be honest about their medical history, expectations of upcoming treatment, and their attitudes and behaviors towards illness and recovery. In this way, mutual trust is built between the parties involved. This allows patients to exercise their autonomy and make decisions in their best interests.

A social ethical virtue that concerns keeping a promise, showing good faith and honesty, is **integrity**. Patients often feel vulnerable and unsure of who they can trust or rely on. Nurses are in a unique position to create an atmosphere of trust in which patients feel safe and cared for. Good practice requires them to be open, honest and provide quality care to those in need. Sometimes, some everyday actions such as monitoring the intake of patients' medications, promising additional visits, performing nursing care or delegating certain work duties to appropriate staff are ways to show their dedication and loyalty.

Communication skills are necessary in building relationships between healthcare professionals and patients to achieve understanding, personal expression, to deal with uncertainty, personal mistakes, conflicts of values, etc. [6, 9,].

Keeping medical and personal information confidential is an ethical and legal obligation of every worker in a medical and healthcare facility. **Confidentiality** includes everything seen, entrusted, heard, learned and understood in or on the occasion of working out the profession. It is a key element in the professional relationship between a worker and a patient, depends on their mutual trust and protects the personality and dignity of the patient. It is based on open and honest communication, which is vital for effective healthcare.

The nurse-patient relationship is important not only for conveying information and making ethical and autonomous decisions, but also for improving the patient's psychological attitude. The nursing profession is communicative, and this requires that these skills be developed and maintained with conscious efforts and periodic reassessments. To develop and maintain a professional identity in a period of increasing ethical dilemmas, nurses must internalize professional values [8].

Based on the analysis of ethical virtues, we believe that their application in nursing practice is associated with a number of advantages that should:

- ✓ contribute to greater trust and satisfaction with the services and care provided;
- ✓ improve the patient's emotional state, reduce the leading symptoms and pain sensations, facilitate the diagnosis and application of therapy for patients' health problems;
- ✓ increase the patients' empathy for the treatment process, stricter adherence to the recommendations and advice made;
- ✓ have a primary prophylactic and therapeutic role;
- ✓ reduce patient complaints;
- ✓ determine to the greatest extent the nature of public opinion about the healthcare system.
- ✓ be realized and recognized as a priority in medical practice.

5. CONCLUSION

All people deserve fair, competent and high-quality medical services and healthcare. The health professional-patient relationship is a key element in practice and depends on various ethical virtues, built on the basis of mutual trust, truthfulness, integrity, respect and humane treatment in health care. They are interconnected and are the basis of professionalism and good nursing practice.

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