

Creative Commons Licence

This material was created by Antonio Manuel Brenes Castaño at the University of Cádiz (UCA) as part of the OpenCourseWare (OCW).

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

You are free to share and adapt this material for non-commercial purposes, provided that appropriate credit is given, a link to the original resource and the licence is included, any modifications are indicated, and any adapted material is distributed under the same licence

Activity Two – Reading Comprehension

Healthcare Ethics: Guiding Professional Nursing Practice

Read the following text and answer the questions below.

Healthcare Ethics is the branch of medical practice that focuses on establishing moral principles, duties, and legal boundaries to ensure safe, compassionate, and patient-centered care. Registered nurses combine clinical knowledge with bioethical standards to make sound decisions, protect patient rights, and navigate complex medical situations. Their ethical obligation is reflected in every healthcare setting, from emergency rooms and intensive care units to community clinics and palliative care.

The ethical decision-making process usually begins by identifying a moral dilemma or a breach in patient rights. Nurses must carefully assess the situation, gather essential clinical facts, and evaluate options based on four core bioethical principles: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Respecting autonomy means empowering patients to make informed decisions about their own medical treatment, while beneficence requires healthcare professionals to act in the patient's best interest.

When a treatment carries significant risks, nurses must balance beneficence with non-maleficence—the fundamental duty to "do no harm." Furthermore, justice ensures that healthcare resources, empathy, and high-quality care are distributed fairly to all patients, regardless of their socio-economic status, background, or medical condition. During patient interactions, nurses also play a vital role in obtaining informed consent and safeguarding patient confidentiality.

Modern nursing ethics also places great importance on patient advocacy and accountability. Nurses serve as advocates by speaking up for vulnerable individuals who cannot communicate their own wishes, such as unconscious patients or minors. Furthermore, accountability requires nurses to take full responsibility for their

professional actions, maintain standards of care, and report clinical errors or incidents immediately to prevent patient harm.

Nurses rarely face ethical challenges alone. They collaborate with doctors, ethics committees, social workers, and patients' families to resolve complex disputes, such as end-of-life decisions or refusals of life-sustaining treatment. Effective communication, active listening, and moral courage are therefore essential skills for resolving healthcare ethics dilemmas successfully.

As modern medicine continues to evolve with new technologies and complex treatments, Healthcare Ethics plays an increasingly vital role in maintaining trust between healthcare providers and patients, protecting human dignity, and ensuring safe nursing practice.

Reading Comprehension Multiple Choice

Choose the correct answer.

1. What is the main purpose of Healthcare Ethics in nursing?
 - a) To memorize legal statutes and court cases.
 - b) To establish moral principles and ensure safe, compassionate patient care.
 - c) To replace clinical treatment plans.
 - d) To manage hospital finances and administrative costs.
2. What does the principle of autonomy require nurses to do?
 - a) Make all medical decisions for the patient.
 - b) Respect the patient's right to make informed decisions about their care.
 - c) Administer medication without informing the patient.
 - d) Force patients to accept life-saving surgeries.
3. According to the text, what is non-maleficence primarily concerned with?
 - a) Distributing healthcare resources fairly.
 - b) Protecting patient records from unauthorized access.
 - c) Fulfilling the professional obligation to "do no harm."
 - d) Following doctors' orders without question.
4. Why is patient advocacy an essential role for nurses?

- a) It allows nurses to speak up for patients who cannot express their own wishes.
 - b) It helps hospitals lower their operating budget.
 - c) It forces family members to agree with the medical team.
 - d) It reduces the need for ethical committees.
5. How do healthcare professionals resolve complex ethical dilemmas?
- a) By letting the hospital manager make the final choice.
 - b) Through collaboration among nurses, doctors, ethics committees, and families.
 - c) By ignoring the patient's personal beliefs.
 - d) By following personal instincts without consulting clinical standards.

Answer Key

- 1. b) To establish moral principles and ensure safe, compassionate patient care.
- 2. b) Respect the patient's right to make informed decisions about their care.
- 3. c) Fulfilling the professional obligation to "do no harm."
- 4. a) It allows nurses to speak up for patients who cannot express their own wishes.
- 5. b) Through collaboration among nurses, doctors, ethics committees, and families.