When the diagnosis is disaster: Ethics and human rights

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When the diagnosis is disaster: Ethics & human rights

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Yokohama, Japan

2007
Mass Casualty & Training

Quality response to disaster impacted by quality of training and education of responders

Nature of disasters has potential global impact
  - Global = borderless
  - Avian flu (H5N1) and threat of pandemic

Questions:
  - What is essential content in education?
  - At what level of practice should such education occur?
UN Declaration on Human Rights

December 10, 1948

Generally Assembly requested this to be disseminated, displayed and taught in schools, without regard for political status of countries, territories

39 articles

Affirm “inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all members of the human family”

- Act toward each other in spirit of brotherhood
- No one held in slavery
- No distinction of any kind, such as race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status
- Right to life, liberty, security, nationality
- Freedom of movement within borders; and freedom to go outside of borders and back again
- Family has the right to protection
- Freedom of conscience, thought, expression
- Recognition as a person in front of the law
Human Rights & Teaching Nursing

- Human rights “assumed”
  - Value of human beings central to nursing

- Common meaning cannot be assumed
  - Groups with differing status world-wide
    - Women
    - Children
    - Persons with disabilities

- Burden of content / knowledge forces didactic choices
  - Boards of nursing / accreditation requirements or limits on courses of study
  - What is essential to “basic” nursing?

- Personal “world view” involves core values, perceptions, assumptions that are rarely articulated
Ethics & Nursing

- Science of human duty; the body of rules of duty
- The rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession
- Systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior
  - Meta-ethics: where our moral principles come from and what they mean
  - Normative ethics regulates right & wrong conduct
  - Applied ethics: how principles apply to specific situations
An Example of Ethical Principles

- Question: Abortion
- Meta-ethics asks: Where do rights come from? What kinds of beings have rights?
- Normative ethics: Right of self-determination; Right to life
- Applied ethics: Is abortion a “right” or ethical decision if the mother’s life is in danger? If the fetus has a genetic disorder incompatible with life under any circumstance? In the case of rape or incest? If the mother has a mental defect?
Ethics in Today’s News (CNN.com 05/30/07)

- CDC: Airline passengers may have been exposed to drug-resistant Tuberculosis

- Two flights involved:
  - Air France 385 on May 12
  - Czech Air 0104 on May 24

- Should the US have stopped passenger from traveling?
Ethics as Topic for Instruction

Where does ethics fit into nursing curricula?
- Assumed?
- Subsumed?
- Do we even need it?

When we send sons & daughters to college or school, what do we want them to learn?
- To graduate, thinking just like us?
- To have their own ideas and ideals?
- Do we want them to be critical thinkers?
## Critical Thinking: Guide to action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptualize</th>
<th>Gathered by…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze</td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesize</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate…</td>
<td>Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Based on universal intellectual values:</th>
<th>Entails examination of thought: purpose, concepts, empirical grounding; reasoning, assumptions, leading to conclusions, implications and alternative viewpoints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clarity, accuracy, good reasons, precision, consistency, depth, relevance, evidence, breadth, and fairness</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Things that make our educational and professional challenges greater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of the world</th>
<th>Nature of health care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have v. have not disparities greater (national &amp; international)</td>
<td>Profit-focused; $$ driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global societies (&gt; obligation)</td>
<td>Short-stays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence of disasters</td>
<td>Greater acuity of illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politically influenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of nursing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Nature of nurses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technologically-rich in more developed countries</td>
<td>Technology-savvy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 hour shifts ⇒ fatigue</td>
<td>Technology &amp; media influenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less emphasis on time, story, touch, basic assessment (non-technologically based)</td>
<td>- Interest in “blood &amp; guts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Time and story” at odds w/ profits-drive of corporations</td>
<td>- Desensitized adrenalin “rush”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Being with” is lesser/ less skilled care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in economic security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth and lack of experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethics in Instruction

- A subject for undergraduates/ diploma?
- A subject for graduates and researchers?
- Where to place it?
- How many of us have completed NIH-NCI Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams certificate self-learning module?
Why Nurses Need to Know

Questions we never thought we would confront

- Who is dead?
  - How can you tell in the absence of senses?
    - In the absence of usual signs?
  - What can be ask nurses to do with regard to those presumed dead?

- Who is “qualified” to perform procedures?
  - How much to involve children?
    - How alone can we leave them to make decisions?

- Is it right to deprive nurses of physical freedom to assure care? How far can we go?

- Who is our patient? What are we obligated to do for them?
  - “The sick”?
  - The family?
  - Neighbors?
  - Community members?
Questions of Concern to Us: Framing our behavior

- Worrying about staff productivity
- Exposing patients to ridicule? Or preserving dignity?
  - Mardi Gras costumes
- Short supplies / wrong supplies
- “Looting” vs. “Borrowing to save life”
- Broken promises (“We’re coming!”)
- Taking weapons to work
- Who to evacuate? Patients? Families? Staff?
- Hiding identity as health professional—refusing to serve? Or preserving sanity?
What we can demand to know

Health care facility responsibility
- For patients
- For staff
- For administration?
- For staff families/friends?

How can we “discharge” if they have nowhere to go? Boarder status?
- If they don’t leave are they still patients? Do responsibilities to boarders change?
- Or are they human beings first?

Liability for behavior under duress
- Abandonment in the face of hopelessness and duty to family vs. rescue at hand?
Are there any decisions that are not ethical at their core?
Our Responsibilities as Educators & Practitioners

- Prepare
- Consider hard questions
- Be willing to accept ambiguity
- Be willing to make decisions that are impossible
- Train students to face impossible choices
  - To plan for actions that are unthinkable
  - To articulate a rationale for what they have done
    - To face that decisions that look “right” in the moment may not be deemed “right” through lens of time
- Teach peers and students to care for each other in disaster (“Talk each other down”)
- Increase our own awareness of global realities and our role in global society
  - Venture beyond our own comfort zones
  - As ourselves “why” we believe and think as we do
Our Responsibilities

- Challenge ourselves to be informed
- Challenge ourselves to think in new ways
  - To accept our responsibilities in the world
- Challenge ourselves to change
- Encourage our sons and daughters to think and reason for themselves, and then challenge their thinking
- Make “ethics” and “human rights” part of our language and part of the way we live our lives
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For homelands around the world

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