2007

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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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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Observation</td>
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<td>Analyze</td>
<td>Experience</td>
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<td>Synthesize</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>Evaluate… information</td>
<td>Reasoning</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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</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>
<td>purpose, concepts, empirical grounding; reasoning, assumptions, leading to conclusions, implications and alternative viewpoints</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Nature of the world
- Have v. have not disparities greater (national & international)
- Global societies (> obligation)
- Incidence of disasters

### Nature of health care
- Profit-focused; $$ driven
- Short-stays
- Greater acuity of illness
- Politically influenced

### Nature of nursing
- Technologically-rich in more developed countries
- 12 hour shifts ⇒ fatigue
- Less emphasis on time, story, touch, basic assessment (non-technologically based)
- “Time and story” at odds w/ profits-drive of corporations

### Nature of nurses
- Technology-savvy
- Technology & media influenced
  - Interest in “blood & guts”
  - Desensitized adrenalin “rush”
  - “Being with” is lesser/ less skilled care
- Interest in economic security
- Youth and lack of experience
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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