< >

4.1 Ethical Considerations and Evidence-Based practice

Nina Smolander, Annukka Isokoski and Raija Kokko

Ethical considerations are entwined in every aspect of life. Particularly in nursing, the ethical aspects are fundamental core values assumed from healthcare professionals and expected by patients and their significant others. The understanding and internalisation of ethical principles constitutes the basis of every nursing decision and action. (Kangasniemi, Pakkanen, & Korhonen, 2015.) Therefore, the ethical considerations are discussed throughout the DigiNurse Model and referred to in various contexts in this publication.

The core ethical components comprising the foundation of quality care are phrased in the international Nurse's Ethical Code of Conduct (International Council of Nurses, 2012) and educated during the nursing studies. Acting on the best interest of the patients and causing no harm to patients are basic ethical principles. Respecting the autonomy of patients and following the codes of confidentiality, privacy and equality likewise comprise the basis of ethical competency taught during the healthcare

64

> The understanding and internalisation of ethical principles constitutes the basis of every nursing decision and action.

< >

education. (Stogiannos, 2019.) Healthcare professionals must follow professional values such as integrity, compassion, trustworthiness and responsiveness (International Council of Nurses, 2012). In counseling or coaching relationships, the ethical aspects are further emphasised with regards to the patient's rights to informed, autonomous decision-making and a delivery of accurate and objective information in a balanced and comprehensive way. The veracity is a fundamental requirement to strengthen the relationship between healthcare professionals and patients and expected to be delivered with cultural competency. (Mitchell, 2017.) In addition, the healthcare professionals must recognise their own personal ethical values and potential issues influencing their professional behaviour and co-operation with patients and their significant others (Kangasniemi, Pakkanen, & Korhonen, 2015).

Some ethical considerations, such as respect, confidentiality and collaborative decision-making (More information in Chapter 5.4), get emphasised specifically while caring for patients with chronic conditions. In long-lasting nurse-patient relationships the aspects of ethical issues occur in a bi-directional way and mutual respect should always be present. The healthcare professional's respect for the patient's expertise about their condition and the patient's respect for the healthcare professional's expertise forms a companionship, which results in quality care based on patient-centred, ethically solid decisions (International Council of Nurses, 2012). The Nurse's Ethical Code of Conduct constitutes the foundation of ethically considerate care.

The ethical conduct of care has traditionally applied to nursing in face-to-face encounters. The development and shift of nursing to digital envi-

ronments has created various options, innovations and responsibilities for the healthcare professionals, affecting the ethics in nursing (More information in Chapter 5.8). The same requirements of technology and ethics concern healthcare students who also require more education related to technological advancements. Regardless of the current state of digital care in practical nursing environments, in nursing education adaptations of curricula are necessary to achieve the skills required from the future professionals. (Meetoo, Rylance, & Abuhaimid, 2018.) Nurses are expected to stay updated on the opportunities to provide digitally performed patient education and support. The availability of various digital tools will increase patients' opportunities to acquire health-related information and stay informed by utilising the digital materials according to their needs. (Heiskell, 2010.) Furthermore, people are increasingly used to digital communication methods and tools and assume opportunities to receive care and counselling through digital channels. The developments in the field of digitalisation and technology may present various ethical issues related to boundary settings, communication structures and information delivery regulations. (Wilcoxon, 2015; Regulation 2016/679/EU). Digitally stored and collected health-related information will potentially create significant ethical challenges but also increase safety via information accessibility and traceability. The reliability of the tools and storage units will be topical in future discussions and require careful regulations. (Meetoo, Rylance, & Abuhaimid, 2018.) On the other hand, digital tools and applications may generate an environment where safe care can be provided even during exceptional circumstances, e.g. pandemics (Martin, 2020).

National and international guidelines and regulations on ethical digital services and data protection provide the framework for ethical considerations in digital healthcare. According to the European Comission Ethics guidelines for trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (AI) (2019), the trustworthy AI should not only be lawful and robust but apply ethical principles of respect for human autonomy, prevention of harm, fairness and explicability. According to the WHO's guidelines on digital interventions for health system strengthening (2019), there are many opportunities to improve the efficiency of healthcare services and health promotion by digital interventions. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the digitalisation alone is not enough to face the challenges of health systems and achieve universal health coverage, but it does bring a valuable component to the development work (WHO, 2019).

Ethics in nursing education must follow the evolvement and changes of societies. The Code of Ethics for Nurses, which was initially launched in

1953 and last updated in 2012, is under revision to meet the requirements and challenges of a revolving and interconnected world. The better the global understanding of the Code by nurses in every nursing field, the more profound the nurses' ethical competency will be. While the core content of ethical principles needs further strengthening, the added ethical content related to AI, technology and various digital communication methods needs to be integrated firmly to the Code of Ethics for Nurses. (Stievano & Tschudin, 2019.) The refined and adjusted methods of healthcare education will support this goal. The teaching of ethical considerations e.g. in study groups is suggested to be more effective than lecture-based education. Students' abilities to comprehend the patient's safety, autonomy and confidentiality, in particular, will be improved as training is organised in teams. (Kareff, McNulty, Goodman, & Agarwal, 2019.) Moreover, further training of ethical competency for healthcare professionals has been suggested. The ability to recognise and define the ethical needs and dilemmas is rising in importance. As nurses are acting as an advocate for the patient, their enhanced ethical awareness and readiness to influence ethical decision-making can improve wholistic care. The opportunity for advanced ethical education will increase nurses' professional growth and improve ethical quality care. (Neumann, Counts, & Jernigan, 2019.)

These requirements of a refined Code of Ethics for Nurses and educational adjustments in nursing education have been integrated into the DigiNurse Model (More information in Chapter 5.2). Human dignity and collaborative decision-making in connection to technology are intertwined in every element of the model. Therefore, the ethical aspects are mentioned in many chapters of this e-book.

Recommended reading:

- The ICN code of ethics for nurses. (2012). International Council of Nurses. Retrieved from: https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/inline-files/2012_ICN_Codeofethicsfornurses_%20eng.pdf
- Blackwood, S., & Chiarella, M. (2020). Barriers to uptake and use of codes of ethics by nurses. Collegian (Royal College of Nursing, Australia), 27(4), 443-449. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.colegn.2019.11.005

References:

European Commission. (2019). Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI. In Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI. Publications Office. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai

Heiskell, H. (2010). Ethical Decision-Making for the Utilization of Technology Based Patient/Family Education. Online Journal of Nursing Informatics (OJNI),14 (1). Retrieved from: http://ojni.org/14_1/Heiskell.pdf

International Council of Nurses. (2012). The ICN The Code of Ethics for Nurses. International Council of Nurses, 3, place Jean-Marteau, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland. ISBN: 978-92-95094-95-6. Retrieved from: https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/inline-files/2012_ICN_Codeofethicsfornurses_%20eng.pdf

Kangasniemi, M., Pakkanen, P., & Korhonen, A. (2015). Professional ethics in nursing: an integrative review. Journal of advanced nursing, 71(8), 1744–1757. Retrieved from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/jan.12619?casa_token=-u6IwwRCaB8AAAAA:KLHwLrsKnSCywjY4kkulKr4Nl-p4aOV9NLn78bg6FDGXwOv7HYGzIGuE8pDhYxTEq_cpKbOp-D1AC-g

Kareff, S. A., McNulty, M., Goodman, K. W., & Agarwal, G. (2019). Introducing first-year dual-degree medicine and public health students to ethics and professionalism. Journal of Hospital Ethics, 6(2), 95–100. Retrieved from: https://search.proquest.com/docview/2428567964/fulltext/B09B-F45E67EF42B8PQ/1?accountid=14242

Martin, M. (2020). The ethics of emergent health technologies: Implications of the 21st century cures act for nursing. Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice, 21(4), 195–201. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527154420947028

Meetoo, D., Rylance, R., & Abuhaimid, H. A. (2018). Health care in a technological world. British Journal of Nursing, 27(20), 1172–1177. https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2018.27.20.1172

Mitchell, N. (2017). Ethics interface. Journal of Life Care Planning, 15(3), 45–53

Neumann, J., Counts, V., & Jernigan, C. (2019). The role of oncology nurses as ethicists: Training, opportunities, and implications for practice. Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing, 23(1), 103–107. https://doi.org/10.1188/19.cjon.103-107

Regulation 2016/679/EU. Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing

< >

Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation). Retrieved from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj

Stievano, A., & Tschudin, V. (2019). The ICN code of ethics for nurses: a time for revision. International nursing review, 66(2), 154–156. Retrieved from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/inr.12525

Stogiannos, N. (2019). The effect of ethics on professional practice for MR technologists. Radiologic Technology, 90(5), 513–516.

WHO. (2019) Who guideline: recommendations on digital interventions for health system strengthening. (2019) Geneva: World Health Organization;. (WHO/RHR/19.9) Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Wilcoxon, S. A. (2015). Technology and client care: Therapy considerations in a digital society. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 36(4), 480–491. https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1128

<   >

-