

Ethical Decision Making in Nursing Practice

Ethics Examined

Directions: Answer each statement or questions in the space provided. Use additional paper as needed.

The following cases illustrate everyday ethical dilemmas faced by nurses. Use the ethical decision making model and decide what you would do – and what principles apply.

Case Study #4

Grace is a 34 year old woman who has been hospitalized many times over the course of her treatment for cancer. She has been on the same unit each time. Joan is a nurse who has often cared for her; they are the same age and are both mothers of three children the same ages. During the night shift Grace becomes violently ill from her chemotherapy and Joan is at her bedside providing emotional support. A nursing assistant rushes in and says that another patient needs a nurse immediately. Grace cries and begs Joan not to leave her.

Using the modified Ethical Analysis Framework, what would you do if you were Joan? Write down the pertinent information for each step.

Step 1. Self Awareness

Step 2. Identify the Problem

Step 3. Gather Relevant Data

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Step 4. Identify Ethical Principles Involved/Define the Ethical Dilemma

Step 5. Identify resources, options, and consequences-

Step 6. Make a Decision/Plan the Action to be Taken

Step 7. Act/Implement the Plan

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Case Study #5

Susan is the only registered nurse working on an inpatient psychiatric unit on a busy Saturday morning. The unit is short staffed and five of the patients are scheduled to leave for weekend passes with family. In addition to charge duties, Susan has to administer medications. The usual morning routine has the patients reporting to the medication room for their AM medications. Susan identifies John Smith as he comes to the door. She prepares his dose of two antipsychotic drugs which were ordered in liquid form. Susan gives the medication cup containing the medication to the patient at the medication room door and he drinks it. She immediately realizes that John Smith apparently left the room and Robert Jones had stepped to the door and accepted the medication. Susan notes that the drug type and dosage were very different from the beginning antidepressant dosage ordered for Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones had not questioned why he was given liquid medication and had gone to the lounge to wait for his family to take him home for the weekend. There were no other staff members in the vicinity of the medication room.

Using the modified Ethical Analysis Framework, what would you do if you were Susan? Write down the pertinent information for each step.

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Case Study #6

Mark McDermott is a registered nurse in a long term care facility. Two years ago after being laid off from the local factory, Mark went to nursing school. He recently graduated, passed the NCLEX exam and went to work at Honor Nursing Home. Mark is married and has four children. He was unemployed for 6 months before he went to nursing school and worked part time in a retail store. Mark's wife is a teacher aide who does not get paid during the summers.

As a newly hired RN Mark must successfully complete a probationary period to be hired permanently and get a \$1000 sign on bonus. His three months of probation will end in one week. During this probation period Mark has been counseled several times about the need to prioritize care and complete his assignments in a more timely manner. During his last conference with the nurse manager he was told that not completing his assignments on time creates a hardship for his co-workers who are unable to call on him if assistance is needed and he was reminded that he is on probation.

Today, Mark is assigned to six patients who need varying amounts of care, with three of them requiring total care with medication administration and feeding via gastrostomy tube. It is 11:45 and all of Mark's patients have been washed, turned, and skin care given. Mark realizes that he is scheduled to relieve another nurse for lunch at noon. He has not given the medications to the three patients with the gastrostomy tubes and he has not done the tube feeding for one of them. The three patients are comatose/disoriented/ unaware of their surroundings; two share a room and the other is in a private room. Mark's other three patients have been dressed, assisted to wheelchairs, and taken to the dining room for lunch.

Using the modified Ethical Analysis Framework, what would you do if you were Mark? Write down the pertinent information for each step.

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Case Study #7

Cynthia is a nurse in a critical care unit. Because of short staffing, the nurses have been routinely assigned to 2-3 patients every shift for the past two months and have worked voluntary and mandatory overtime. At the end of their shift Cynthia and her coworker, Kara plan to leave work and go to a youth soccer game in which both their children are playing. This is a championship game and both Cynthia and her coworker have missed the two previous games. They have shared their frustration at being told by their children that they “are never around and don’t care about us.” With one hour left in the shift one of Kara’s patients has a sudden drop in his blood pressure. Kara contacts the physician and is given orders for stat procedures and medications. She tells Cynthia that she has time to complete the orders, but she hasn’t charted the care and medications she gave her other two patients. She tells Cynthia what she did for them and says that she can leave on time if Cynthia will do her charting.

Using the modified Ethical Analysis Framework, what would you do if you were Cynthia? Write down the pertinent information for each step.

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Case Study #8

Martha is a registered nurse on a pediatric unit. She was preparing to administer medications to Joey, a two year old with pneumonia, when she realized that she had used the medication in his medication drawer for the other patient in the room. The other patient is six months old. The medication in the other child's drawer is also an antibiotic, although not the same drug or dosage. Another nurse is waiting for the medication cart so that she can administer medications to her patients and the unit pharmacist is in a meeting for the rest of the afternoon.

Using the modified Ethical Analysis Framework, what would you do if you were Martha? Write down the pertinent information for each step.

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Case Study #9: Applying the m-EAF to a Personal Situation

In an effort to put the concepts learned in this course into practice, think back to a particular situation which you believe to have included an ethical problem. If you are having trouble identifying an ethical problem, think back to a situation in which you may have felt uncomfortable.

Describe the situation, including all the individuals involved, and their position regarding the issue at hand:

Now let's apply the m-EAF to this situation. Write down all of the pertinent information.

Step 1. Self-Awareness

List your values and beliefs that may be impacting on this situation. Consider all of your personal, familial, cultural, regional, religious, professional and other values.

Step 2. Identify the Problem

What is the nature of the problem at hand? Identifying the problem correctly can be a challenge, however if the problem is not identified correctly, than finding a solution becomes more difficult.

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Step 3. Gather Relevant Information

Include all objective data, as well as subjective data relative to cultural/religious issues, the process of the relationship between the individuals involved, any policies and procedures that may be applicable. Are there laws or regulations to be considered in this situation?

Step 4. Identify the Ethical Principles Involved/Define the Ethical Dilemma

Reflect on the situation; look at the ethical principles presented in this course; identify those that apply to this situation. Be very specific about what is the ethical dilemma in this situation.

Step 5. Identify Resources, Options and Consequences

Consider all the resources available to you to assist in this situation. What guidance can be obtained by the ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses? Colleagues? Ethics Committees? Etc? Identify the various options open to you in this situation. What are the benefits and consequences of each of these options?

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Step 6. Make a Decision/Plan the Action to be Taken

After consideration of the various options, a decision must be reached and a plan of action developed. Write out a plan detailing the roles, behaviors and actions needed in order to implement your particular decision, identify rationales for your actions. How will this plan be communicated to others involved in the situation?

Step 7. Act/Implement the Plan

Take the steps necessary to carry out the plan. Your role as the nurse will vary depending on the particular situation.

Step 8. Evaluate the Plan/Outcome

Was the plan effective? What was the outcome of the plan? Has the ethical dilemma resolved? What did you learn about ethics from this situation? What did you learn about yourself? Others? How will you use this knowledge in the future?
