

College's role in ethical promotion of nursing

A Kalateh Sadati^{1*}, H Salehzade², H Joulaei³, S Hemmati⁴

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Because teaching code of ethics to nurses has been considered the gold standard for many nursing colleges and universities, the main goal of this article was to evaluate the effect of college of nursing in changing the attitude of nursing students to professional ethics.

Method: The study was performed as sectional-descriptive on 60 students first year (first and second semester) and 60 last year students (seventh and eighth semester) of nursing college of Fatemeh Zahra Shiraz university which were selected randomly. Data was gathered using a questionnaire including general level, patient rights, and endeavour for professional improvement. Frequency, mean value, and t-test was used for data analyzing. Data were analyzed using Spss software ($P \leq 0.05$).

Results: 79 (% 65.8) of students were female and 41 (%32.4) of them were male. The average age was 21 ± 1.7 , there was not any significant difference between the viewpoints of both groups for professional behavior in general level ($P=0.65$), patients right ($P=0.07$), and professional improvement ($P=0.43$).

Keywords: Professional ethics, Attitude, Nursing, College role

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Introduction

In any professional occupation, ethical values and principles are the interrelated concepts that help individuals to make ethical decisions in the workplace. Professional ethics or code of ethics is the essential concept that every employee must be obligated to. In other words, code of ethics, which is a set of statements on professional ideology, maintains that every genuine profession has an ethic. On the professional side, "an occupation's code conveys the impression that this is true for it and hence it is a profession" (1).

This concept has an important role in information systems, medicine, engineering and nursing to name a few (2-6).

In the healthcare systems, ethics is the fundamental concept and basic need. Professional code of ethics plays an important role in nursing care and practice (7, 8). The code of ethics for nurses provides guidance for nurse-client relationship, the community, and the profession. Because nursing and nursing care has a crucial role in the healthcare

system; internalization code of ethics and nursing socialization is the basic affair for academic institutions that make effort to train nurses. The importance of code of ethics in nursing and its internalization is the main starting point for the institutional policies. These institutions try to internalize code of ethics and then train the professional nurses accordingly. The most active training institutions for nurse educators since 1950, according to Storch (2007), are ANA (American Nurses Association), ICN (International Council of Nurses), CNA (Canadian Nurses Association) and CNATN (Canadian Association of Trained Nurses). Furthermore, another institution is FEPI (Federazione Europea delle Professioni Infermieristiche; European Federation of Nursing Regulators) institution which was founded in 2004 (9). The basic purpose of all these institutions is to define and promote the nursing code of ethics in theory and practice. In fact, nurses' responsibility to advocate for patients and the profession produces an obligation to know and use ethical principles as a basis for providing compassionate and competent care (6). One of the famous institutions that have been

¹Department of Sociology, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

²Department of Epidemiology, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

³Health Policy Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

⁴Department General of Fars Province Education, Shiraz, Iran

*Corresponding Author: A Kalateh Sadati, Department of Sociology, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran, Tel: +98-7117243413, Email: asadati@sums.ac.ir

active in developing code of ethics for nurses is American Nurses Association (ANA) that published a nursing guide for carrying out nursing responsibilities and promoting the responsibility of nursing roles as an outcome of code of ethics. Today, the Code of Ethics for Nurses (herein referred to as the Code) serves as nurses' moral compass in articulating the ethical obligations, duties, standards, and principles to which all nurses are both accountable and responsible irrespective of role, position, or practice setting (5).

Despite the important role of NGOs in ethics education, role of the educational official and governmental institutions specially the colleges of nursing has a fundamental effect in preparing professional and ethical nurses. Therefore, we cannot condone the important role of ethical nursing care in educational institutions (college of nursing) in this field. A recent study identified the curriculum content that advocates of nursing ethics believe will foster development of ethical decision-making skills among baccalaureate nursing students (10). To attain ethical nursing, the academic function has a serious and substantial role. Evaluating this function can lead to our understanding of how much every academic or department and college of nursing education is effective. Furthermore, the findings of relevant researches will help us with future strategies in this field.

Admittedly, the empirical research on ethics in professional nursing (qualitative or quantitative) has occupied a great deal in the reviewed literature. Fagan (2006) compared two groups of nursing students (110 subjects) with each other utilizing Nurses Professional Value Scale. The results indicate that there was one significant difference in the belief of two groups. Fagan (2006) has also suggested that completion of nursing program may not necessarily have a major impact on ethical development of nursing students (7). Molloy and Cribb (1999) conducted a qualitative research on professional ethics. The data derived from qualitative interviews with 20 nurses working in occupational health site and their discussion focused mainly on aspects of shifting 'ethical context'. Their findings show that changing cultures, as well as reshaping professional roles and identities, double standards and the balancing act health professional and/or manager? Are the main concepts that affect ethical and moral practices of nurses (11) Barbara and Judith (2008) have also emphasized on developing interdisciplinary law and ethics courses for colleges of health care (12). LeDuk and Kotzer (2009) did a comparison study between three groups of nursing students, new graduates and seasoned practitioners (13). The findings did not support the supposition that experience is the prerequisite for a registered nurse to develop professional value. In addition, due to the mean age of the student samples (26 years vs. the typical age of 18 to 22 years), generational incongruence related to value orientation was not found. Their research findings also indicate that there is not a significant difference between these three groups in terms of professional values (13). Another study conducted by Oberle (1993) evaluated the effect of faculty on nursing values in three phases. Her findings revealed the absence

of well-developed nursing ethics. She further concluded that reliable and valid evaluation of nurses' thinking about ethical problems is an unachievable goal because lack of agreement among faculty members made it impossible to develop a "best response" to the plan (14). While comparative studies discussed above offer valuable insights into the ethical values in nursing practice in other countries, this study attempts to assess the impact of nursing college on the promotion of professional ethics on nursing students in Iran.

Methods

As before noted the primary and substantial aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of education in a nursing college on the behavioral changes of nursing ethics in nursing students. Doing this, we further aimed to promote nursing ethics in Iran. This study hypothesized that nursing college training does not change the attitudes of nursing students as regards to nursing professional ethics. This hypothesis was originated because the college of nursing does not adopt any set of standards for professional ethics training.

This research based on sectional-descriptive method that two groups of students of nursing were compared with each other about professional ethics. Sampling was census and those students that were willing to participate in the study enrolled to research.

In this research we examined changes in attitudes of 120 nursing students in H.F Nursing College toward nursing code of ethics. The participants were divided in two groups; one group consisted of the first and second semester nursing students and the second group included the sixth and upper semester nursing students. The logic behind this selection was that junior nursing students were in the same condition of not having any nursing clinical practices while our senior group had passed many clinical practices as part of their curriculum requirements. Another assumption made in this study was that general condition of this nursing college within these 4 years (the length of undergraduate nursing) remained unchanged as regards to professional ethics. As far as this study area is concerned, in this college (and most other nursing colleges in Iran) ethics practice standards have not yet been included in undergraduate nursing curriculum. In other words, these colleges do not offer any courses, lessons or teaching sidelong codes of ethics in nursing. This might lead to nursing practices that are unethical and unprofessional. Accordingly, to test the previously mentioned hypothesis, a questionnaire with 39 items was used in order to assess code of ethics in general dimension, code of ethics relevant to patients' rights and code of ethics relevant to effort to professional promotion. Face validity of the questionnaire was assessed by having experts provide their opinion about the questions of the questionnaire. After data collection and data entry in SPSS14, Cronbach's Alpha was checked and irrelevant questions were eliminated. The alpha coefficient for general dimension was 0.85, for patients' right was 0.89 and for effort to profession promotion was 0.088, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

According to interviews with school officials, about 140 students who were able to participate in the study. 11 students don't willing to participate in the study.

Results

A total of 129 questionnaires were distributed to students, but only 120 duly filled questionnaires were returned back. After distribution the questionnaires some students were not willing to answer and 9 questionnaires remain unanswered. Out of 120 participants, 60 of them were sorted in the first group and the remaining 60 in the second group. The former consisted of first and second semester nursing students while the latter consisted of sixth and upper semester students. The sample of the study included 79 female %65.8 and 41 male %34.2 nursing students. The participants' age ranged from 17 to 25 with the average age of 22 years old %21.7. Table 1 shows the comparison of attitude change to professional ethics between two groups.

Table 1. Comparison of attitude change to professional ethics

	N	Mean±SD	t	Sig
First group (1th and 2th semester students)	60	131.250±26.77	0.446	0.657
Second group (6th and upper semester students)	60	129.33±19.83		

As it can be seen in Table 1, not only isn't there any significant difference between the two groups, but also senior nursing students' attitude towards professional ethics has declined. However this result isn't significant and don't be considerable. This is a worrying result. Indeed, if a college or academic institution doesn't define and promote standards of professional ethics, we can assume that this college doesn't acknowledge and accept the critical relationship between health and human rights. As it was mentioned earlier, surprisingly, sixth and upper semester students' attitude toward professional ethics went down (from 131.25 to 129.33). Although some other factors may have a role in this decline, the main reason perhaps lies behind college's goal and duty in terms of valuing quality nursing care. As it was previously stated, this college doesn't offer separate ethics course as part of nursing curriculum. Furthermore, ethics nursing talks, workshops and seminars are not hold regularly for nursing students in this college or any other colleges. This, in fact, considered a serious gap in the college of nursing.

As mentioned earlier, for better evaluating our data we classified professional ethics in three different categories namely: general dimension, patients' rights and effort to professional promotion dimension. Table 2 shows the comparison between two groups in general dimension of ethics.

According to Table 2, there is a decline for professional ethics in general dimension for senior nursing students. This, too, might be caused by lack of clear ethical

principles and standards set forth nursing students in this college. Table 3 shows professional ethics in patient rights dimension.

Table 2. Professional ethics comparison in general dimension

	N	Mean±SD	t	Sig
First group (1th and 2th semester students)	60	38.93±10.00	0.7	0.505
Second group (6th and upper semester students)	60	37.90±6.54		

Table 3. Professional ethics comparison in patient rights dimension

	N	Mean±SD	t	Sig
First group (1th and 2th semester students)	60	55.70±10.92	1.8	0.077
Second group (6th and upper semester students)	60	57.25±10.62		

As it can be seen in Table 3, the result is noticeable because as nursing students go to higher semesters, the rate of professional ethics on patient rights goes up too. The possible reason behind this is that sixth and upper semester students have more clinical practice in hospital; hence, their experience may affect and promote their attitude toward patient rights. Table 4 shows comparison between two groups in effort to professional promotion dimension.

According to this table as nursing students advanced to higher semesters, their level of professional motivation declined. It is believed that lack of familiarity with code of ethics for nurses and the difficulties and the hardship that they have to endure in their clinical practice hindered nursing students' professional motivation at their final stages of their education.

Discussion

Today, more than ever, nurses, regardless of their role, encounter with tremendous challenges that often give rise to ethical issues. Nurses, managers, and educators will find ANA's new guide to the Code of Ethics for nurses a powerful tool for teaching the staff and students how to apply the values in the Code of Ethics to professional practice. Ethical practices, values, and principles are the foundation on which moral action and moral decision making in professional practice are essential. Respect for people embraces the notion that one's values, beliefs, and human dignity are acknowledged and preserved. Nurses have obligations to patients, one another, and the global community to assure optimal health, personal well-being, and quality of life for all with whom they come in contact (6). So nurses' codes of ethics have been regarded as important elements of nurses' ethical knowledge base and

consequently part of nurses' ethics education since 1893 when 'The Nightingale Pledge' was introduced to nurses (15). The main goal of code of ethics is the responsibility of any nurse in theory and practice. In addition to sicker patients who require highly skilled, knowledge based assessment; intervention is the growing need to possess expert skills to operate increasingly complex technology. Further factors that complicate the care environment include fiscal pressures, nursing shortages, reliance on supplemental staffing, changing patterns of ethnic, generational, and gender diversity (6).

To provide ethical nurses, the university and college of nursing has the main role and duty. Studies suggest that students are responsive to formal courses in nursing ethics (16). Therefore, designing and applying the protocols of ethical strategic planning to prepare professional nurses for healthcare system should be the main duty of every college. In practice, the primary task is to design and offer professional ethics syllabus in college of nursing. In other words, colleges of nursing should have definite curriculum syllabus in their didactic plan. However, it is worth mentioning that this plan is essential but not enough. Concurrently, NGO of nursing and managers of medical systems should endeavor to help universities and academic colleges of nursing for teaching ethical nurses. We should also bear in mind that teaching code of ethics to nurses is the complex process which needs cooperative sector actions. The main goal; nevertheless, should focus on promoting the code of ethics for nurses in Iran in nursing and health care domains.

Indeed, nursing academic domain has a main role in training professional ethics of code. The output of this training is the promotion of many concepts relevant to code of ethics. The consequences for failing to instill a sense of responsibility, ethics, and morals within nursing students can have long-term implications. Just ask yourself, "Would I want my loved one to be cared for by someone who cheated his or her way through nursing school?" I believe the answer to that question emphasizes the need to ensure all nursing students are conducting themselves with honesty and integrity (17). Consequently, every college should train its students to be prepared for their future role. However, it has been argued that most nursing colleges in Iran do not have clear planning for teaching nursing code of ethics and this is the main blind spot of these colleges.

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