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Ethical needs assessment of associate degree nurses seeking a Bachelor's degree

Annie Huynh, Heidi He and Kathleen Gilchrist
California State University, USA

Background: Ethics is a branch in philosophy utilizing a systematic approach to understand, analyze and distinguish matters of right and wrong, good and bad as things are related to the well beings of life. It is an integral part of the healthcare profession. Many nurses encounter morally distressing situations each and every day. Associate degree nurses have graduated from programs often with an intense curriculum with a focus on preparatory nursing skills to function at an entry level of nursing. According to DeSimone (2016, p. 1), "Few nursing curricula offer a course dedicated exclusively to ethical decision making." Nurses often develop critical thinking skills when evaluating clinical situations, including ethical situations. Nurses may only have the knowledge they have gained from their experiences in clinical settings. Many times, stressful situations have led nurses to job dissatisfaction, burnout and abandonment of the profession. The results of this study assisted nursing faculty to plan a successful educational curriculum in healthcare ethics.

Purpose: This study explores RN-BSN (Registered Nurse to Bachelor degree in Science for Nursing) students' knowledge and perceptions of healthcare ethics.

Methodology: A quantitative, descriptive, exploratory design was utilized. A researcher developed, 20-question survey was e-mailed to all RN-BSN students enrolled in an on-line ethics course through SurveyMonkey*. Data were downloaded by the researchers and analyzed employing frequency statistics. IRB approval was granted.

Results: There were 30 subjects that responded for a response rate of 45%. Eighty-three percent were female and 80% of the subjects had practiced nursing less than five years, mainly in the hospital setting. Over 75% ranged in age from 26 to 45 years old. Half of the subjects noted they had received some form of healthcare ethics training in their Associate Degree Nursing program. However, 70% were not satisfied with the previous healthcare ethics training; over 90% expressed interest in receiving more training. More than 90% of the nurses reported frequently encountering ethically challenging situations in their work. Yet, 50% believed they had come across morally distressing situations. Only two nurses had ever been subpoenaed to testify regarding patient care. RN-BSN students had a difficult time with a question concerning the difference between ethics and values. More than half (56.67%) of the nurses had never read the American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics and sadly only 30% had never read the California Nursing Practice Act.

Nursing Implications: ANA's Code of Ethics (2015) is a valuable document for all nurses to read and understand. It is the foundation of ethical decision making. Moreover, knowledge of the state Nurse Practice Act is crucial for nurses to make sound, appropriate ethical decisions in each state. Results indicate that ADN nurses may have had some ethical training, but that they wanted more education. Future educational interventions can be generated with this knowledge to further prepare and assist ADN nurses to deal with ethically challenging situations.