



Code of Ethics for Nurses

Adopted at the Danish Nurses Organization's congress on 20 May 2014



Danish Council of Nursing Ethics



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Background

The Danish Council of Nursing Ethics was appointed at the Danish Nurses Organization's congress in 1990. The first Code of Ethics for Nurses was adopted at the Danish Nurses Organization's congress in 1992. The code was revised in 2004 and again in 2014.

The latest version of the Code of Ethics for Nurses from 2014 is based on the nurses' field of work, fundamental ethical values and principles in nursing which offers a series of general ethical guidelines for nurses applicable in their day-to-day work.

The Code of Ethics for Nurses constitutes a code of professional ethics for nurses and should constantly be developed and reflect social and legislative changes relating to the reality and ethical challenges of nurses and contribute to develop the profession and safeguard its credibility and reputation.

In the code, all recipients of nursing are referred to as patients.

Basis

The Code of Ethics for Nurses is based on the fundamental understanding that each human being is unique and valuable, interacts with his or her surroundings and takes responsibility for his or her own life.

In the Code of Ethics for Nurses each relation between patient and nurse is, as a rule, based on trust and respect.

Objective

The Code of Ethics for Nurses is indicative of ethical dilemmas and problems when they arise in the domain of nursing. The domain of nursing is: 'to undertake nursing, to communicate nursing, to manage nursing, to develop nursing'. Nursing represents both health-promoting, health-maintaining and preventive activities as well as treatment, rehabilitation and care.

The code respects Danish legislation. It is based on the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 and the International Council of Nurses' (ICN) Code of Ethics for Nurses from 1953 last revised in 2012.

The code contributes to:

- Promoting ethical reflection in discussions and considerations among nurses.
- Promoting nurses' ethical judgement in order to develop a high level of professional quality.
- Supporting nurses in situations that require decision-making.
- Bringing ethical dilemmas and ethical practice into focus.

The following outlines the fundamental ethical values in nursing, fundamental ethical principles in nursing and general ethical guidelines in nursing.

Ethical core values in nursing

The nurse is responsible for providing care to ensure that the patient experiences well-being.

Responsibility. The nurse has a professional, personal, ethical and aesthetic responsibility in relation to patients requiring nursing. Execution of power is only morally justifiable when performed in solidarity with the weak party. The responsibility includes an obligation to provide care.

Care is performed in the relation between people, between the nurse and the patient. In this relation, the nurse meets the patient, senses the human being and views him or her through an understanding built on benevolence. Herein lies a moral principle of acting in a way that gives all human beings equal opportunities to live the best life possible.

Well-being is a condition of feeling comfortable. Well-being ranges from short moments of relief, alleviation and comfort to long-term well-being understood as optimal health and quality of life, where the ideal is 'the good life'. Well-being is considered a main objective of all nursing. Nursing contributes to supporting patients' own initiatives to achieve well-being.

Ethical core principles in nursing

Connected to the fundamental ethical values in nursing – responsibility, care and well-being – are a series of principles for good ethical conduct:

- Respect for the right to autonomy – that is, that the individual patient, to the extent possible, maintains control of his or her own life and right to make choices.
- Acknowledging dignity – that is, that the individual patient is considered a unique and endlessly valuable human being.
- Consideration for integrity – that is, that the individual patient's values, personality, being, wishes and goals in life are respected.
- Care for the vulnerable life – that is, that the individual patient is offered protection and care.

General ethical guidelines in nursing

Good ethical conduct entails that the nurse, while respecting the patient's right to self-determination, must:

- 1.1 promote the patient's right to self-determination
- 1.2 respect the patient's choices, including the patient's right to choose not to exercise his or her right to self-determination
- 1.3 promote and respect the patient's right to autonomy, regardless of his or her individual values and goals in life, provided that they do not violate other people's rights and goals in life
- 1.4 ensure that the patient receives and understands the information required to make choices. The information must be adjusted to the patient's wishes and needs and the patient's life situation
- 1.5 protect patients that are unable to exercise the right to autonomy.



General ethical guidelines in nursing

Good ethical conduct entails that the nurse, while acknowledging dignity, must:

- 2.1** make nursing available to all patients in need hereof
- 2.2** safeguard the patient's interests to ensure that the care and treatment provided takes into consideration the individual circumstances, needs and values
- 2.3** assume professional and personal responsibility for own assessments and actions and exercise professional judgement, take a critical stance and demonstrate courage and consideration
- 2.4** reflect on own practice and respond to ethical situations and dilemmas that occurs to the nurse, the patient, relatives, the profession and society
- 2.5** initiate and promote respectful professional and cross-disciplinary collaboration throughout the healthcare system
- 2.6** demonstrate responsibility for communicating the potential consequences of political prioritisation within the healthcare system.

General ethical guidelines in nursing

Good ethical conduct entails that the nurse, while showing consideration for integrity, must:

- 3.1 respect the patient's values and belief
- 3.2 base nursing activities on the patient's wishes in relation to physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs
- 3.3 show respect for and care for relatives
- 3.4 call attention to circumstances that may affect the patient's health positively or negatively.



General ethical guidelines in nursing

Good ethical conduct entails that the nurse, while caring for the vulnerable life, must:

- 4.1 contribute to protect and preserve lives and to alleviate suffering
- 4.2 protect the patient from violation, including situations that involve the use of force, retention or other forms of curtailment of rights
- 4.3 contribute to ensuring that the patient can die with dignity and to ending or preventing futile treatment
- 4.4 challenge legislation and instructions, insofar as they violate the ethical values of the profession
- 4.5 prioritise the consideration of the patient's life, integrity and wishes in the event of disagreement or conflicts of interest
- 4.6 safeguard the patient's life and integrity when new methods and technology are introduced.



Notes





Sygeplejeetisk Råd

Sankt Annæ Plads 30

DK-1250 København K

www.dsr.dk/ser

email: ser@dsr.dk



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