



## Nursing Practice Implications of The Year of Ethics

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The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN) joins with the American Nurses Association (ANA) in its designation of 2015 as "The Year of Ethics." ANA's 2015 Code of Ethics provides a guide for quality care and ethical obligations in professional nursing practice (ANA, 2015).

Last summer I had the distinct pleasure of joining 50 leaders from other professional organizations who are experienced in the fields of nursing ethics, education and research to attend a summit on Nursing Ethics for the 21st Century. The goals of the summit were to set

ethical priorities for the nursing profession to promote the creation of ethically principled work environments, and to improve outcomes for patients, families and communities (Johns Hopkins School of Nursing & Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics, 2014).

The Code of Ethics is foundational to nursing practice, and is a document with which all nurses should be familiar. Unfortunately, many nurses haven't reviewed the Code since their primary nursing education. Reviewing the Code of Ethics has caused me to reflect on the nurse and leader that I am today and has influenced

**Abstract** The 2015 ANA Code of Ethics is foundational to professional nursing practice and is aligned with AWHONN's core values, standards of care and position statement on ethical decision-making in the clinical setting. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of nurses to ensure an ethical practice environment is critical to perinatal health outcomes and staff engagement and to the prevention of moral distress. DOI: 10.1111/1751-486X.12183

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and strengthened my practice. My sincere hope is that by integrating the Code of Ethics, outlining action plans and driving change, nurses will help advance health care, create positive work environments and enhance nurse satisfaction.

### Nurses' Roles and Responsibilities

Nurses are protected under federal law from assisting in health care procedures that conflict with their personal beliefs. However, nurses have certain ethical obligations to their patients. AWHONN's position statement on ethical decision-making (AWHONN, 2009a) addresses the nurse's rights and responsibilities toward ethical care of patients. Nurses should be non-judgmental when providing care and should inform their employers, at the time of employment, of any personal beliefs that may interfere with essential job functions.

The nine provisions in the Code of Ethics focus on compassion, respect, accountability, commitment and advocacy, which are key characteristics that promote an ethical environment. The Code indicates that nurses also have a duty to self and to others, to ensure health, safety, competency, integrity and professional growth. An environment that's collaborative and supportive of research and scholarly inquiry is essential to quality and ethical practice.

Reviewing the Code of Ethics has caused me to reflect on the nurse and leader that I am today and has influenced and strengthened my practice

One of the provisions suggests that professional organizations must articulate nursing values and incorporate principles of social justice into practice and health policy (ANA, 2015).

In these transformational health care times, such as with the introduction of the Affordable Care Act and an increased focus on population health, it's even more critical to align core

values of the profession with care delivery. The core values as defined by AWHONN (2009b) are aligned with the Code of Ethics, and are as follows:

1. Commitment to professional and social responsibility.
2. Accountability for personal and professional contribution.
3. Respect for diversity of and among colleagues and clients.
4. Integrity in exemplifying the highest standards in personal and professional behavior.
5. Nursing excellence for quality outcomes in practice, education, research, advocacy and management.
6. Generation of knowledge to enhance the science and practice of nursing to improve the health of women and newborns.

These core values, denoted by the acronym CARING, are foundational to excellence in nursing practice and support work environments that promote optimal patient outcomes and staff engagement.



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