


Perioperative Nurse Leaders and Professionalism 1.8 www.aornjournal.org/content/cme

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Purpose/Goal

To provide the learner with knowledge of best practices related to ethical and professional leadership in the perioperative environment.

Objectives

1. Describe the elements of ethical decision making.
2. Identify value systems that are important in the perioperative environment.
3. Discuss the importance of establishing standards for perioperative nursing practice.
4. Discuss the importance of continuing professional development.

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As an employee of the Competency and Credentialing Institute, Dawn Whiteside, MSN, RN, CNOR, RNFA, has declared an affiliation that could be perceived as posing a potential conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

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ABSTRACT

Professionalism in nursing leadership encompasses key elements that include a common body of knowledge, autonomous practice, self-regulation through education and licensure, a set code of ethics, and a commitment to altruism. Perioperative nurse leaders also must embrace collaboration, vision, accountability, and patient and staff member advocacy based on established ethics, values, and standards of care. Nurse leaders who are committed to professional development through pursuit of higher degrees, application of evidence-based practice, collaboration with colleagues, and certification show a strong commitment to their profession and serve as role models for staff members. This article discusses professionalism in nursing and offers information specific to perioperative nurse leaders. *AORN J* 104 (August 2016) 134-141. © AORN, Inc, 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aorn.2016.06.003>

Key words: *professionalism, leaders, ethics, accountability, professional development.*

The benchmark for ethics in nursing practice is the American Nurses Association's (ANA's) *Code of Ethics for Nurses*.¹ AORN provides perioperative explications² that guide perioperative nursing decisions and ethical practice based on this code of ethics. The ANA states that the code for nurses is nonnegotiable and that each nurse has an obligation to uphold and adhere to the code of ethics.³ The perioperative nurse leader is responsible for understanding and promoting the standards outlined in the code as they relate to personal and professional ethical conduct. Perioperative nurse leaders should be familiar with this code of ethics and apply its principles when making decisions that influence unit culture.

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Altruism (ie, concern for the welfare of others) is a basic tenet of ethical behavior for nursing professionals. Ideally, nurses make choices guided by foundational ethical principles and base their conduct on an established altruistic code. An example of a positive ethical behavior is adherence to the concept of the surgical conscience. Surgical conscience requires that breaks in aseptic technique are identified and actions are taken to correct them, whether or not another staff member

witnessed the contamination.⁴ Guidelines, standards, and a code of conduct may be available to the nurse, but ethical practice requires a personal commitment to ensure that best practices occur. Personal and professional decisions are likely to result in positive outcomes when based on ethical practice. [Sidebar 1](#) illustrates an example of surgical conscience, detailing the ethical dilemma that identifying a break in technique may create for a nurse and the consequences of not speaking up.

Informed Decisions

Professional ethical behavior requires making informed decisions. Nurse leaders are responsible for their own decisions; however, they are also tasked with influencing health care team members' decisions in promoting ethical practice. According to Doucette, "A key responsibility of the nurse leader is to ensure that the highest ethical standards are maintained and discussed during the decision-making process."^{5(p46)}

There are six fundamental elements that should be involved in the ethical decision-making practice of nurse leaders, including respect, nonmaleficence, beneficence, veracity, fidelity, and justice.⁵ Nurses and nurse leaders may be required to consider

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