

Ethical Principles for Nursing Education National League for Nursing January 2012

Introduction

In recent years, National League for Nursing members have expressed concerns about ethical issues encountered in nursing education programs. These issues include, but are not limited to, academic dishonesty, incivility, violence between peers and/or supervisors, and breaches in confidentiality and defamatory statements, sometimes associated with the use of social media. The ongoing national debate on ethics and bioethics vis à vis health care delivery has critical implications for nursing practice. Ethical issues can involve students, faculty, and others engaged in nursing education on campuses, in online learning environments, and during clinical experiences.

Based on its core values of caring, integrity, diversity, and excellence, the NLN has developed ethical principles for nursing education programs. These principles aim to help foster environments that promote academic and professional integrity, ultimately enhancing patient care and positive outcomes.

Background

Inherent in the NLN's commitment to nursing education and to the specialized role of the nurse educator is dedication to the student and to the profession of nursing. It is vital for students to become worthy and effective members of society with a respect for the highest ideals of the nursing profession. By promoting a climate that encourages students to exercise sound clinical judgment, practice using ethical standards, and support and respect their colleagues, nurse educators demonstrate their commitment to the profession. These obligations are at the heart of the nurse educator's role to influence the next generation of nurses who will value caring, collaborative learning, and ethical standards of practice.

The NLN fully recognizes the value of codes of ethics developed by the American Nurses Association and the International Council of Nurses; the use of these codes by practicing nurses to guide clinical practice are a long held standard in the nursing profession. The League also appreciates previous efforts to consider an ethical code for nurse educators (Rosenkoetter, 1983; Rosenkoetter and Milstead, 2010). The current effort by the NLN seeks to broaden ethical guidelines for nurse educators, to address the development of a culture and environment that is based on cooperation, support, and mutual enrichment needed to fulfill the educational goals of a program of learning. The NLN Ethical Principles for Nursing Education provide a foundation for ethical practice for all members of the nursing education community, fulfill the NLN's commitment to ethical practice within the total learning environment, and are based on the core values of caring, integrity, diversity, and excellence.

Caring

Caring actions result in positive outcomes for colleagues, students, and members of the community at large. Caring for self transforms into caring effectively for others, approaches evidenced by open, two-way communication, active attempts to understand others' needs, and development of an environment that offers assistance to those who cannot care for their physical and psychosocial needs. A learning environment should encourage freedom to explore and question. Nurse educators need to foster academic environments that respect various points of view, encourage curiosity,

exploration of knowledge, and questioning. In order to care for others, one needs to care for self. This belief has its foundation in the concept of academic freedom which holds that freedom of inquiry by students and faculty members is essential to the mission of the Academy. Academic freedom as a right of faculty members is derived from the guarantee of free speech under the First Amendment.

In order for students to learn caring behaviors, it is crucial for nurse educators to model those behaviors to colleagues and students by:

- Recognizing the importance of caring for self as foundational to caring for others
- Creating an environment that embraces acceptance and encourages freedom to voice constructive criticisms and concerns
- Engaging in relationship-centered interactions

Integrity

Integrity involves treating others with respect – communicating with one another in a positive, courteous manner, honoring confidences, and maintaining a professional demeanor both in and out of the workplace. Communication transcends verbal communication and includes email, social networking, and texting. Integrity calls for taking responsibility for one's actions and advocating for professional values and beliefs. Decisions should reflect transparency, doing the right thing for others, and seeking fairness and equality by:

- Modeling professional behaviors that demonstrate honesty, respect for self and others, accountability, and self growth
- Maintaining confidences of colleagues, students, and those for whom we care
- Demonstrating courage to challenge the status quo and to advocate for professional values and beliefs
- Formulating decisions that reflect ethical principles

Diversity

Diversity supports environments that celebrate the uniqueness of individuals, fostering open, respectful, and candid communication. It encourages innovative teaching strategies to address a variety of learning styles, taking into consideration the impact of cultural and experiential influences. Fair treatment of all is supported through nondiscriminatory practices in relation to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and other ideologies. Diversity can be achieved by:

- Creating environments that provide open and respectful exchange and promote fair practices among all persons
- Fostering autonomy and freedom of conscience
- Developing and implementing teaching strategies that respond effectively to individual learning styles
- Affirming the value and significance of contributions made by persons of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs

Excellence

Excellence requires engagement in scholarship and activities that promote professional growth, improvement, and understanding. A healthy nursing academic work environment includes the development and sustainability of a collegial environment, institutional support for the nursing unit, and strong leadership that guides efforts to create and implement transformative strategies with daring ingenuity. Generate excellence by:

- Co-creating an environment that embraces collegiality, competence, and support for ongoing professional growth
- Fostering a spirit of inquiry that can produce a culture of innovation and creativity
- Constructing a climate conducive to transformational learning through an improved education system