

Nursing advocacy



Nurses nowadays are increasingly required to offer not only just physical comfort for their patients (as it had been in the past) but also the psychological, social and spiritual comfort for them. This takes one more importance, especially if the patient does not have some immediate family members to look after him/her. In such scenarios, the nurse takes the role of the sole care giver and the patient's most trusted figure. Therefore, the nurse has to communicate effectively, protect, speak out as well as bond with the patient. In essence, the nurse has to be the patient's advocate. Nursing advocacy can ideally be defined as the works (efforts) of nurses in promoting and protecting the interests and well being of the patients under their care. This is achieved when the nurses go out to explain for the patients their (patients') rights and facilitate their access to the crucial information so that they are able to make some informed decisions (Vaartio et al., 2006). Essentially, nursing advocacy is meant to ensure that a patient is properly informed about his/her health status. Additionally, it ensures that patients are adequately supported during the decision making process. This paper analyses some important issues that pertain to nursing advocacy.

Evolution

Nursing and advocacy go hand in hand; they are inseparable. Zolnieriek believes that “advocacy is the heart and soul of nursing” (2010). This simply means that advocacy has been practiced as long as nursing. However, advocacy was not given that much of importance for a long time. It was only until the 1970s that the nursing advocacy actually began to take its shape. From then on, it has grown in importance, and nurses are nowadays guided how to approach this as a very crucial practice (Hanks, 2010). Nurses

nowadays are expected to call their attention when there he/she perceives any medication error, to speak out of the patient with his/her health care team colleagues and help in making the policies touching any health matters. Nursing advocacy is now entrenched in the profession (Wood, 2010).

Why Advocacy Is Needed?

Advocacy is needed in two levels: the patient level and the national level. At the former, it acts as the patients' watchdog. The nurse takes on the patient's voice when the latter is unable to. Advocacy ensures that the patient is safe at all times vi regular and prompt checkups or informed of the hospital stays and visits. Nurse advocates for transforming the health centers into less intimidating places. They act as the patients' most trusted guides, defenders, and the most crucially friends (" Medi-Smart").

Nursing advocacy is needed at the national level to push for systematical improvements into the health sector. These improvements may range from facilitating the access to health care, the elimination of bad health practices and the patient rights' policy formulation. Advocacy is also meant to protect and foster a very important profession of nursing such as addressing the nurse shortage crises, nurse burnout, and the nurse ill treatment (" Medi-Smart").

Advocating for the patients and fellow nurses is very important. It is universally accepted that this practice should be entrenched into the health sector. It is through this growing importance that the practice is being given more attention during these days. For instance, since every nurse is

expected to be an advocate, she is being taught on how to approach this the best way. This is because of the potential negative impacts that this may have on the patient if any incorrect guidance is offered. Advocacy encompasses the whole medical profession. This simply means that every health care giver is involved. There are many nursing associations that fight for the rights of nurses. These associations are tasked with offering guidelines for the best nursing practices for their members as well as giving the nurses their voice during the treatment of patients. Such associations facilitate this kind of advocacy.

Ethical Concerns

Nurses are meant to facilitate the treatment and healing of patients. However, the actual treatment is left to the physician. This simply means that physicians have the absolute say on what should be done. Therefore, when a nurse perceives that a physician is giving the wrong medication, it is seen as a lack of respect to the physician. This leads to the conflict of interest and potential disagreements and sackings. For instance, there were two nurses in Texas who had the feeling that the physician's (from the Winkler Memorial Hospital) medication was actually endangering a certain patient. They reported of the physician to the hospital's management but no action had been taken. They resorted to forward their complaints to Texas Medical Board. The hospital decided to sack them citing the misuse of the official and confidential information. However, they were later reinstated after the intervention of Texas Nurses Association as they had been right (Wood, 2010).

Nursing advocacy is all about having the patients' interests in the heart. Nurses are not supposed to make any decisions on their behalf. They only have to guide them. However, some patients may make those decisions that are wrong in the eyes of the nurse. In such instances, the nurses are powerless but need to accept these decisions (Wood, 2010).

Resolving Nursing Advocacy Issues

Nurses have reported powerlessness, risks involved, and the lack of support as some of the factors were impeding advocacy (Negarandeh et al., 2006). Powerlessness comes from the fact that they are under the command of physicians. Thus, they cannot make independent decisions. Certain procedures that require any guidance may just be too risky for inexperienced nurses to provide. The lack of support can be seen in the case of two Texas' nurses. Rather than their concerns being addressed, they were sacked from the hospital. The problems raised by the nurses can only be resolved if they are given the proper support by hospitals and other medical practitioners, and if they are given the powers to question the suspect on the physician practices. Of the two, the proper support is most important for nurses. This is because if a nurse has the full support of other medical practitioners, he/she will discharge their activities without fear. The process will not be impeded by physicians or any other person in command. The nurse will openly question some suspect malpractices. They will not hesitate to report such practices to the management knowing very well that their concerns will be addressed. The full support is needed even when the nurses make wrong judgments. Such nurses should be supported all the way, even when lawsuits

are involved. This will ensure that the nurses are emboldened when discharging their advocacy duties.

Conclusion

The advancement of nursing advocacy in the recent past outlines how the nursing profession has grown in importance. Rather than the nurses seeing this as a sacrifice, they should gladly take up the practice as an opportunity to enhance the nursing profession. This will make them even the better health care givers.