

# Healthcare ethics discussion forum

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Healthcare Ethics Discussion Forum 16th Feb, Healthcare Ethics discussion Forum Ethics in healthcare is a key factor that applies to the day to day practice of nursing. Each day nurses continue to face issues that call for the application of the set ethical and legal principles of nursing, but even at those times choosing to save life by applying the best perceived action might contradict the prevailing code of practice or legal rights of the patient (Gutierrez, 2005). Patient autonomy is one major issue that creates conflicts between what the client wants and what is stipulated in the code of ethics and by the law. Focusing on patient autonomy as an ethical dilemma facing nurses, this paper looks at the case of a young girl who gets pregnant after a rape ordeal and who views abortion as her only solution and key to being happy again. The girl is currently traumatized and psychologically disturbed. Through family support and encouragement, the patient has carried the pregnancy for more than eight months but each passing day her emotional and psychological health status continues to deteriorate. She has become depressed, weak and torn to a point that she cannot take the pain anymore. The patient wishes to abort the baby by all means even if it means taking the crude options. The nurse is at this point faced with the challenge of identifying the best choice to take, based on the ethical and legal provisions available (Casterle et al., 2008).

In this case, performing an abortion in respect of the patient's autonomy would be legally wrong for the reason that abortion is against the law, situation that will amount to professional misconduct as indicated by Botes (2000). According to the nursing code of ethics, a patient has a right to make decisions on the choice of treatment, medical procedures and any form of

care to be provided. It is the duty of every nurse to respect that right, hence, in this case disregarding the patient's autonomy (wish to have an abortion done) may be regarded as unethical as stipulated in the nursing code of practice (Casterle et al., 2008).

Turning her away is no better than negligence in case she ends up executing her plans in the backstreet. Supposing the nurse was to turn away the patient and the patient then goes ahead to have the abortion unprofessionally done from illegal centers, then the nurse can be charged with negligence or medical malpractice if the patient suffers any harm (Eileen, 2003). Malpractice is proven by four main principles. The first principle is duty which begins at the moment the patient meets the healthcare provider. The other principle is breach of duty. This according to Helm (2003) occurs when the care provider fails to provide all necessary care and conduct to the patient. Damages, which is the next principle is when harm occurs from neglect or breach of duty. The last principle is causation. This is determined when the harm done can be directly associated with lack of proper care (O'Keefe, 2001).

Evidently, ethical principles stipulated by the set code of ethics have a huge impact on how the law applies to the healthcare process. There are times however when the two processes (ethics and the law) conflict with each other. This has had a huge impact on the current professional practice with the number of malpractice cases increasing every day (Helm, 2003).

#### References

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