

Developing professionalism in nursing



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The following manuscript provides an insight as to what it means to be professional in the field of nursing. It defines professionalism in the context of health and human service delivery. The article also discusses what it means to provide quality service and care in a safe, ethical and legal context, in both an individual and inter-professional context. Also discusses the mechanisms that are in place which monitor professional behaviour in health and human services settings and how they may contribute to quality improvement mechanisms.

Health care professionals of today need to be able to maintain professionalism. Professionalism is defined as methods, conduct aims or qualities of a professional which distinguishes them from being amateur.

For healthcare professionals such as nurses, being professional means that they maintain their national registration and accreditation. This highlights the importance of updating skills and maintaining professional development. The Royal College of Nursing Australia, (2009) states 20 hours of professional development is mandatory for all Australian nurses annually. This in turn is then putting the emphasis on lifelong learning and skills updating in the wake of new discoveries and technologies.

As professionals it is also important that a nurse only works within their own scope of practise and does not undertake any job or position in which they have not been professionally trained to do.

Considered the founder of professional nursing Florence Nightingale could see the need for change within the standard of nursing of her era (Boling 2003). She was the first person to identify nursing fundamentals and to

develop schools to train and educate new nurses in how to care for the infirm. “ Nightingale was the first to define the essentials of nursing to a largely ignorant group that defined themselves as nurses either by trade or as a result of illness in the family. Professionalization efforts had begun” (Boling 2003).

The delivery of quality care is important, as is ensuring that the care is delivered in a safe ethical and legal perspective. It is essential for healthcare professionals to ensure that when they are caring for a patient that they do not compromise the patient safety, legal aspects or cross any ethical boundaries.

It is important for nurses to deliver quality care as it allows for better treatment and increased positive outcomes. According to Dugdale, L., Siegler, M., & Rubin, D. (2008) positive actions which can be evaluated and measured allow for a more personalised commitment to the highest ethical standards.

When discussing the issue of patients admitted to hospital Dugdale, L., Siegler, M., & Rubin, D. (2008) talk about the patient losing their personal identity and that they are identified by the medical condition with which they are afflicted and their bed number. The disease needs to be treated and it can be impersonal, but any interaction with a patient needs to be personal. It is important that a patient is treated as a human being rather than a machine (Dugdale, L., Siegler, M., & Rubin, D. 2008)). A healthcare professional needs to develop a good relationship with their patient so they can obtain a better understanding of client needs and to gauge limitations that may need to be

considered before a treatment plan is implemented(Dugdale, L., Siegler, M., & Rubin, D 2008).

Ethics is a worldwide reflective process. It is there to guide you and act as a “ reasoned voice” (Interprofessional Practise in Health and Human Services 2009). The Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council provides a document called the Code of Ethics for Nurses in Australia. It is relevant for all levels of Australian nursing staff and provides the fundamental areas of values and ethics that the nursing profession is committed to upholding (Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council 2008). It also incorporates other professional guidelines and standards of conduct for nurses, while providing them with a point of reference from which they can conduct themselves and reflect upon as it is a guide for them to make ethical decisions and practise ethically (Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council 2008).

Law is rules and regulations that are implemented by individual countries and states. They are derived from judicial decisions and represent the accepted lower limits of their behaviour in social and professional contexts (Interprofessional Practise in Health and Human Services 2009). According to the Interprofessional Practise in Health and Human Services (2009) “ It is contemporary statement of the standards that you are expected to maintain in your dealings with the social institutions of your state and country, and with others in personal interactions” (p. 110).

It is important to remember that law and ethics go hand in hand, and when you start to learn about one you also learn about the other. Whenever a new

law is discussed the ethics behind it are also discussed (Interprofessional Practise in Health and Human Services 2009).

Patient confidentiality is important, a person being cared for has the right to be able to confide to their care provider about issues that they may have and they have the right to expect that they not be further discussed the health care professional with anyone else. There are many laws which come into play in the field of health care and in most of them patient confidentiality is important, however confidentiality is not absolute in health care and there a several exceptions to it (Interprofessional Practise in Health and Human Services 2009).

The main thing that needs to be remembered is to abide by all relevant codes of ethics, conduct and laws, maintain confidentiality and ensure that patients have knowledge of informed consent to any relevant interventions that relate to them.

The potential for healthcare professionals in particular nurses to be affected by musculo-skeletal injury is high. Back injury is among the highest reported injuries from nurses, with 37% of Canadian nurses reporting in the last year that back pain has been severe enough to affect their usual daily activities Tullar, J., Brewer, S., Amick, B., Irvin, E., Mahood, Q., Pompeii, L., Wang, A., Van Eerd, D., Gimeno, D., & Evanoff, B. (2010). This is of major concern as it not only can affect the staff's ability to provide their patients with the quality of care that they deserve but it can also affect the healthcare professionals ability to actually work at all. Some of the most demanding tasks for a healthcare professional to carry out are patient transfers, and repositioning

and the force that is involved in undertaking these tasks have the potential to cause serious musculo-skeletal injuries to the healthcare professional (Tuller, et al., 2010).

There are a number of mechanisms that are in place for healthcare professionals to ensure that they are working within their scope of practice and providing care in a safe and ethical environment, as well as practising within the law. There are also procedures in place to ensure that unqualified practitioners do not enter the profession and to prevent substandard, unethical and illegal practise from occurring.

The professional code of conduct for nurses in Australia provides a standard to be upheld Australia wide. It provides the minimum requirements and competencies that a nursing professional is expected to uphold to ensure the good reputation of nurses and goes hand in hand with the code of ethics for nurses in Australia which we have already discussed earlier (Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council 2008). They are however not provided with the purpose of providing detailed advice for different professional situations (Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council 2008).

When considering these two codes it should be kept in mind that they are not only designed for healthcare professionals but for multiple audiences including students, patients, other healthcare professionals and generally anyone in the community who wishes to view them (Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council 2008).

National registration came into force on the 1st of July 2010 and replaces the state registration that was in place national registration is a measure to

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prevent that unqualified practitioners do not enter the profession and to prevent substandard, unethical and illegal practise from occurring, when registering there are standards that need to be met (Nursing and midwifery board of Australia).

Healthcare professionals have a duty of care to provide the best possible care to their patients and to ensure the best possible outcomes for all people they encounter and treat. They are expected to do this in a safe comforting environment, while upholding all codes of conduct, and ethics, as well as laws in place to protect them and the people they treat. Healthcare professionals not only need to be respectful and sensitive to their patients but they need to treat their personal information with the upmost confidentiality. The added responsibility that healthcare professionals have make their professional behaviour and actions not optional and they must abide by all rules and regulations in place and endeavour to provide the upmost quality level of care to ensure the most optimal outcome for their patients.