

Navigating Ethical Challenges: The Role of Moral Distress, Sensitivity, and Resilience in the Nursing Profession

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Dear Editor

Moral agency is the ability of individuals to make ethical choices and take responsibility for their actions. It is crucial in healthcare, as it enables professionals to make decisions that respect the dignity and rights of patients. Key components of moral agency include moral sensitivity, which involves recognizing and comprehending the moral aspects of a situation, including how actions affect others. Moral resilience, on the other hand, refers to the capacity to uphold one's integrity and ethical values in challenging circumstances, aiding individuals in managing moral distress and upholding their moral principles. This, in turn, enhances their well-being and job satisfaction (Lützen & Ewalds-Kvist, 2013).

Moral distress occurs when nurses are aware of the correct course of action but are unable to act due to regulations, limited resources, or conflicts with others. This internal conflict can result in feelings of frustration, guilt, and helplessness, ultimately leading to emotional strain, burnout, and dissatisfaction. Common triggers of moral distress include delivering care that may result in suffering, being prevented from providing life-saving interventions to patients with the potential for recovery, and experiencing inadequate staffing levels that compromise patient care (Morley et al., 2019).

Moral sensitivity enables nurses to identify ethical issues in clinical practice. It involves both cognitive awareness and emotional empathy, allowing nurses to understand the ethical dimensions of a situation and recognize the potential consequences of their actions. Nurses with heightened moral sensitivity are better able to identify ethical challenges, grasp their broader implications, and take responsibility for them. This awareness empowers them to make informed ethical decisions, respond effectively to challenging situations, and anticipate how their decisions or inactions impact patients, families, and the healthcare team (Aghakhani et al., 2022).

Additionally, moral resilience is crucial for nurses to uphold their ethical standards in challenging situations. This skill enables them to manage emotional stress, provide compassionate care, and remain true to their values when under pressure. Nurses can also serve as guides to higher purpose during tough times. Seeking support from mentors or counselors can improve their ability to navigate moral dilemmas. It is essential for nurses to address emotions like guilt and frustration in order to maintain their effectiveness. Engaging in regular self-reflection can help strengthen their resilience. Healthcare organizations play a key role in fostering moral resilience by encouraging open communication, providing ethics training, and implementing supportive policies (Galanis et al., 2024).

Nurses frequently encounter ethical dilemmas associated with end-of-life decisions made by patients. It is crucial to tackle these issues to deliver high-quality, patient-centered care. Nursing programs should prioritize the development of moral sensitivity to enable nurses to promptly identify ethical issues. Moral resilience training can equip nurses with the necessary skills to navigate difficult situations by teaching them stress management techniques and promoting self-reflection. Healthcare institutions must promote open discussions about ethics and offer resources such as ethical committees and counseling to assist nurses when they encounter moral dilemmas (Arries-Kleyenstüber., 2021).

Conclusion

The interaction between moral distress, moral sensitivity, and moral resilience is crucial for nurses facing ethical challenges in their work. They frequently encounter tough moral dilemmas that challenge their values and beliefs, leading to emotional distress that affects their job satisfaction. By prioritizing moral sensitivity in nursing education and helping nurses build resilience, healthcare institutions can provide improved support and strategies to alleviate moral distress. Enhancing moral sensitivity and resilience empowers nurses to uphold their values and provide compassionate care when confronted with ethical dilemmas.



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