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Nursing Care—A paradigm shift

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In the present health care system, nursing practice has become not only more demanding, but also very challenging. The rapid development in the health care sector has expanded traditional nursing care into varying dimensions. Now, a nursing professional has to perform much more than the traditional tasks and procedures, to become an effective member of the health care delivery system. It is a big task to equip the nursing trainees to face these challenges during their training period, in nursing schools and colleges. It is equally challenging to update them later, on a continuous basis during their professional practice. The regulatory bodies that govern nursing training have in place a well-planned curriculum that aims at providing adequate training. But, with teaching institutions, which differ significantly in the quality of training offered, it is debatable if, this is being implemented in all the institutions, across India. The qualified nursing professionals work in a diverse spectrum of health care institutions in India. On one end of the spectrum are the government facilities that provide health care from primary to tertiary care levels. These institutions that offer free or highly subsidised care, cater to the health care of a large group of people. They face problems of overcrowding, tight budgets, and long and heavy working hours. At the other extreme are the corporate hospitals, with facilities that can provide excellent patient care that match international standards. But, they come with high treatment costs that most patients cannot afford. A majority of health care institutions, come somewhere in between the quality of care and the affordability. The nursing training offered has to be tailored in a way that the nursing professionals

could perform optimally in these diverse facilities. The nursing professionals face a host of ethical challenges in their daily practice. The patient-health care relationship has now become the kind, where patients are considered as clients or consumers, thus making the relationship look less intimate. Though, this is supposed to ensure quality care, it often raises the bar of service to such a high level that the patients are unhappy with anything less than perfect result for their medical condition. This leads to medical litigations in which the nursing professionals also find themselves implicated. This mandates a nursing practice that is not only legally correct, but also is ethically proper.

The rapid development in medical treatment has made diagnosis and management of disease conditions more accurate and less morbid. There are more and more gadgets being used for daily patient monitoring, drug delivery, indenting, and billing. This necessitates a continuous process of learning to familiarise one with these changing trends. With the surge in information technology that is available at the finger tips, patients are well versed with their disease and its management. The patients are often more comfortable with their nurse than the doctor. This mandates a constant updating of their knowledge, which will help in the decision-making processes. There are various legislations that dictate medical practice in India. Some of the important ones are: The Transplantation of Human Organs Act, Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act, and Environmental Protection Act. The nursing professionals also need to understand the provisions of these other relevant Acts, so that they can help patients in their decision-making process. This will also avoid legal sanctions for

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themselves for non-adherence to the provisions of the Acts.

There are many ethical questions that also need to be addressed on a daily basis during the clinical management of patients. The definition of what is ethical can vary from person to person and is often moulded by what one has learnt during training, personal values, beliefs, and past experiences. Hence, the same ethical dilemma may have different choices. These ethical decisions can impact themselves, the patients, and the institutions. The nursing professionals are often part of this decision-making process or actively involved in its implementation. Sometimes, they are forced to follow instructions and implement decisions, which may be contrary to ones beliefs and convictions. A nurse, who has strong beliefs against abortion, may have to be a part of a team managing a patient undergoing abortion. It is a common situation, where the patient wants to know the details about the disease, while the family wants the information to be withheld from the patient. How will one face an end-of-life situation, when one knows that the treatment that is being given is futile and would increase the cost? How does one nursing professional balance work according to the administrative orders, patient's wishes, and relatives' wishes with his or her own conscience? They are often forced to ignore their conscience about patient care and work, which may be taxing for many,

especially in the beginning. They slowly get used to the setup and ignore their conscience. How will one balance the ethical questions of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice in these situations? Will it vary according to cultural, religious, or financial status of the patient? It is important that these decisions are culturally sensitive and ethically correct.

Research and publication has become an integral part of continuing nursing education. Whether, research has to be done by all is an important question considering the wide range of health care institutions in India. If it is mandated, then it is necessary to provide training in the ethical conduct of research involving human participants following national and international guidelines. It is also necessary to introspect on the training and research facilities provided by the institutions. A protected time and funding for research is also needed for quality research.

Thus, nursing profession has undergone tremendous advancements in its approach to patient care, in order to match the rapid developments in the medical fields. It has given scope for specialisations in nursing that will optimise health care delivery in advanced areas. It is important for the present generation of nursing professionals to effectively combine their nursing skills with administrative, legal, and ethical principles to make them more effective in the complete care of patients.