



Impact of Legal and Regulatory Changes on Nursing Ethics

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Received date: 28 May, 2024, Manuscript No. JNPC-24-140263;

Editor assigned date: 30 May, 2024, PreQC No. JNPC-24-140263 (PQ);

Reviewed date: 13 June, 2024, QC No. JNPC-24-140263;

Revised date: 21 June, 2024, Manuscript No. JNPC-24-140263 (R);

Published date: 28 June, 2024, DOI: 10.4172/2573-4571.1000064.

Description

Nursing ethics, a cornerstone of the nursing profession, is fundamentally concerned with the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. As the healthcare landscape evolves, legal and regulatory changes significantly impact nursing ethics, shaping how nurses navigate ethical dilemmas and uphold professional standards. The legal and regulatory framework governing nursing practice is designed to ensure the safety, quality, and ethical delivery of care. This framework includes federal and state laws, regulations from nursing boards, and guidelines from professional organizations. Changes in these laws and regulations can arise from advances in medical technology, shifts in societal values, or responses to emerging public health challenges. The implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the USA brought about significant regulatory changes aimed at increasing access to healthcare and improving patient outcomes. Similarly, evolving regulations on patient privacy, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), have reshaped how nurses handle sensitive patient information.

One of the primary ethical principles in nursing is respect for patient autonomy, which involves honoring patients' rights to make informed decisions about their care. Legal and regulatory changes can enhance or complicate this principle. For instance, regulations requiring detailed informed consent procedures ensure that patients receive comprehensive information about their treatment options, risks, and benefits, thereby supporting autonomous decision-making. However, the increased complexity of consent forms and the need for thorough documentation can sometimes lead to ethical dilemmas. Nurses may face situations where patients feel overwhelmed by the information provided, raising questions about the adequacy of the consent process. Balancing the legal requirements with the ethical duty to ensure patients truly understand their choices becomes a critical aspect of nursing practice.

The ethical principle of doing good, and non-maleficence, the obligation to avoid harm, are central to nursing ethics. Legal and

regulatory changes can influence how these principles are applied in practice. For example, the introduction of new clinical guidelines or mandatory reporting requirements aims to enhance patient safety and quality of care. However, these changes can also present ethical challenges. The increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice, while beneficial, may conflict with individualized patient care. Nurses may encounter situations where adhering strictly to clinical guidelines may not align with what they believe to be in the best interest of a particular patient. Navigating these conflicts requires careful ethical reasoning and often necessitates advocating for the patient's needs within the constraints of regulatory frameworks.

The principle of justice, which entails fair and equitable treatment of all patients, is deeply influenced by legal and regulatory changes. Policies aimed at reducing healthcare disparities, such as those embedded in the ACA, reflect efforts to promote justice in healthcare. These changes can help address systemic inequities by expanding access to care for underserved populations. Nonetheless, ethical dilemmas can arise when regulatory mandates conflict with resource limitations. Nurses may face situations where they must allocate limited resources, such as during a public health crisis, challenging their commitment to providing equitable care. Ensuring that all patients receive fair treatment while adhering to legal and institutional guidelines requires ethical vigilance and advocacy.

Nurses are legally and ethically accountable for their practice. Regulatory changes often introduce new standards of care, documentation requirements, and reporting obligations. Compliance with these regulations is crucial for maintaining professional licensure and avoiding legal repercussions. However, the pressure to comply with legal mandates can sometimes conflict with ethical considerations. For instance, mandatory reporting laws designed to protect vulnerable populations, such as child abuse reporting requirements, may put nurses in difficult positions when patients disclose sensitive information. Balancing the legal duty to report with the ethical duty to maintain patient trust and confidentiality requires careful ethical deliberation.

Conclusion

Impact of legal and regulatory changes on nursing ethics is profound and multifaceted. While these changes aim to enhance patient safety, quality of care, and equitable access, they also introduce complexities and ethical dilemmas for nursing professionals. Navigating these challenges requires a deep understanding of both legal requirements and ethical principles. Nurses must continuously engage in ethical reflection, advocate for their patients, and strive to uphold the core values of their profession within an ever-evolving legal and regulatory landscape. By doing so, they can ensure that their practice remains both legally compliant and ethically sound, ultimately contributing to the well-being and dignity of the patients they serve.

Citation: Rojas B (2024) Impact of Legal and Regulatory Changes on Nursing Ethics. J Nurs Patient Care 9:2.