

SIXTH EDITION

NURSING ETHICS

Across the Curriculum and Into Practice



approaches, and theories used in studying ethics throughout history so they can identify and analyze ethical issues and dilemmas relevant to nurses in the 21st century. Matire, ethical sensitivities are critical to ethical practice, and as Hope (2003) proposed, "we need to develop our hearts as well as our minds" (p. 6).

The Meaning of Ethics and Morals

When narrowly defined according to its original use, ethics is a branch of philosophy used to study ideal human behavior and ways of being. The approaches to ethics and the meanings of related concepts have varied over time among philosophers and ethicists. For example, Aristotle believed ideal behaviors are practices leading to the end goal of *eudaimonia*, which is synonymous with a high level of happiness or well-being. On the other hand, Immanuel Kant, an 18th-century philosopher and ethicist, believed ideal behavior is acting in accordance with one's duty. For Kant, well-being meant having the freedom to exercise autonomy (self-determination), not being used as a means to an end, being treated with dignity, and having the capability to think rationally. Ethics is a systematic approach to understanding

in doing ethics. However, people sometimes allow their emotions to overtake good reasoning when this happens, it does not provide a good foundation for ethical decisions. Evaluations generated through the practice of ethics require a balance of emotion and on their culture, have engaged people, based they believe are justifiable only to have the light of reason later show otherwise. Following a charismatic but egocentric leader such as Adolf Hitler is an example of such a practice.

ETHICAL REFLECTION

Consider a person who believes abortion is wrong based on the position that human life is sacred. Can this same person logically justify that the death penalty is a moral action?

As contrasted with ethics, **morals** are specific beliefs, behaviors, and ways of being derived from doing ethics. One's morals are judged to be good or bad through systematic,

Ethical Reflections

Develop critical thinking skills with discussion-based activities that revolve around nursing ethics.

When people consider matters of ethics, they usually are considering matters about freedom regarding personal choices, one's obligations to other sentient beings, or judgments about human character. The term *unethical* is used to describe ethics in its negative form, for instance, when a person's character or behavior conduct endorsed by one's society or the code of or profession. Because the word *ethics* is used in a variety of ways, the process of studying ethics is sometimes overlooked today. People often use the word *ethics* when referring to a collection of actual beliefs and behaviors, thereby using the terms *ethics* and *morals* interchangeably. In this text, some effort has been made to distinguish the words *ethics* and *morals* based on their literal meanings; however, because of common uses, the terms have often been used interchangeably.

The following features regarding the concepts of *morals* and *ethics* were adapted from Billington (2003):

- Probably the most important feature about ethics and morals is that no one can avoid making ethical decisions because social connections with others necessitate that people must consider moral and ethical actions.
- Other people are directly or indirectly involved with one's ethical decisions. Private morality does not exist.

Types of Ethical Inquiry

Ethics is categorized according to three types of inquiry or study: *normative ethics*, *meta-ethics*, and *descriptive ethics*. The first approach, **normative ethics**, is an attempt to decide or prescribe values, behaviors, and ways of being that are right or wrong, good or bad, admirable or dishonorable. When using the method of normative ethics, inquiries are made about how humans should behave, what they are ought to be done in certain situations, what type of character one should have, or the type of person one should be.

LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

Common law is based on customs and previously decided cases rather than on statutes.

Outcomes of normative ethics are the prescriptions derived from asking normative questions. These prescriptions include accepted moral standards and codes. One such accepted moral standard identified by Beauchamp and Childress (2019) is the common morality. The common morality consists of a set of norms that members of a society generally agree about and are familiar to most members of the society. These norms develop within the context of history and culture.

Legal Perspectives

Promote thinking critically about legal scenarios in the discipline of nursing.

for upsetting the sociopolitical status quo. Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens who, under his tutelage, began to question traditional wisdom and religious beliefs. These accusations of corruption were based on Socrates encouraging people to think independently and question dogma generated by the ruling class. Though he was sentenced to death by the powerful, elite men within his society, Socrates refused to apologize for his beliefs and teachings. He ultimately chose to die by drinking poisonous hemlock rather than deny his values.

Plato, Socrates's student, is believed by some to have been the most outstanding philosopher to have ever lived. Plato's reasoning is based on his belief that there are two realms of reality: the first is the realm of *Forms*, which transcends time and space. According to Plato, an eternal, perfect, and unchanging ideal copy (Form) of all phenomena exists in day/human access. Plato believed the realm of *Forms* contains the essence of concepts and objects and even the essence of objects' properties. Essences existing in the realm of *Forms* include, for example, a perfect Form of redness (the color red) or a horse. In the realm of *Forms*, the essence of good exists as ideal Truth, and redness (a particular property of color red in its most perfect state) exists as the realm of *Forms* is the perfect specimen of a horse that is a horse, and this perfect horse contains all the "horse-ness" factors that Plato considered the world of *Forms* to be the real world, though humans do not live in this world.

The second realm is the world of *Appearance*, which is the everyday world of imperfect, decaying and changing phenomena; this is the world in which humans live. The purpose of *Appearance* is to emulate their associated essences and perfect *Forms*. For example, a horse's purpose in life is to strive toward

becoming identical to the perfect specimen of a horse that exists in the world of *Forms*.

Plato also proposed that humans have a tripartite soul. The three parts of the soul consist of the Faculty of Reason, associated with thought and Truth, which is in one's head; the Faculty of Spirit, which expresses love, beauty, and the desire for eternal life and is in one's chest; and the Faculty of Appetite, which is in one's gut. Plato believed the influences of these three parts of the soul exist in greater or lesser degrees in each person. Therefore, one person may be more disposed to intellectual pursuits as compared to another person who is more interested in physical pleasures.

- Plato associated the tripartite soul with three classes of Greek society and ones with best-suited occupation. People were believed to have an individual aptitude particularly suited to them and their purpose in society:
 - Philosopher kings were associated with the Faculty of Reason and wisdom.
 - Social guardians were associated with the Faculty of Spirit and protecting others.
 - Artisans and craftsmen were associated with the Faculty of Appetite and technical work.

FOCUS FOR DEBATE

If Florence Nightingale were alive today and she took the position that nurses represent the artisan class, would she be correct? Defend your answer.

Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, was a passionate student of ancient Greek philosophy. Nightingale may have aligned the function of nurses with the Faculty of Spirit (LeVasseur, 1998). Because of her education in classical Greek literature and culture and her views about nursing, LeVasseur proposed that Nightingale might have

Focus for Debate

Weigh in on an interesting scenario relevant to the field of nursing and engage in ethics-related debates.

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Brief Contents

Preface xv

PART I Theories and Concepts 1

- Chapter 1** Introduction to Ethics3
- Chapter 2** Introduction to Bioethics and Ethical Decision Making27
- Chapter 3** Ethics in Professional Nursing Practice67

PART II Nursing Ethics Across the Life Span 105

- Chapter 4** Reproductive Issues and Nursing Ethics 107
- Chapter 5** Infant and Child Nursing Ethics 133
- Chapter 6** Adolescent Nursing Ethics 155
- Chapter 7** Adult Health Nursing Ethics 187
- Chapter 8** Ethics and the Nursing Care of Elders 203
- Chapter 9** Ethical Issues in End-of-Life Nursing Care 225

PART III Special Issues 257

- Chapter 10** Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing Ethics 259
- Chapter 11** Public Health Nursing Ethics 281
- Chapter 12** Ethics in Organizations and Leadership 325

Appendix A: Case Studies	343
Appendix B: ICN Code of Ethics	371
Appendix C: Mississippi Advance Directive Planning for Important Healthcare Decisions Caring Connections	405
Glossary	425
Index	437

Contents

Preface xv

PART I Theories and Concepts 1

Chapter 1 Introduction to Ethics 3

Introduction to Ethics 3

- The Meaning of Ethics and Morals 4
- Types of Ethical Inquiry 5
- Ethical Perspectives 6
 - Ethical Relativism* 6
 - Ethical Objectivism* 7
- Values and Moral Reasoning 7
 - Ancient Greece 8
 - The Middle Ages 10
 - Modern Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment 11
 - Postmodern Era 12
 - Care-Based Versus Justice-Based Reasoning 12
 - Learning from History 13
- Ethical Theories and Approaches 13
 - Western Ethics 13
 - Religion and Western Ethics* 13
 - Virtue Ethics* 14
 - Natural Law Theory* 16
 - Deontology* 17
 - Consequentialism* 18
 - Prima Facie Rights* 19
 - Principlism* 19
 - Casuistry* 20
 - Narrative Ethics* 20
 - Critical Theory* 21

- Feminist Ethics* 22
- Eastern Ethics 22
- Indian Ethics* 23
- Chinese Ethics* 24

Chapter 2 Introduction to Bioethics and Ethical Decision Making 27

Introduction to Bioethics 27

Ethical Principles 28

Autonomy 30

- Informed Consent 31
- Intentional Nondisclosure 33
- Patient Self-Determination Act 35
- The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy and Security Rules 35

Nonmaleficence 37

- The Case of RaDonda Vaught: First, Do No Harm 37
- Date of Incident* 38
- Relevant Background Information* 38
- Events on the Day of the Medication Error: December 26, 2017* 38
- Vaught's Work Repercussions* 39
- The Cover-up* 40
- TN Bureau of Investigation Report* 40
- After Exposure of the Medication Error* 41
- Other Information to Consider* 42

Futility 43

Rule of Double Effect 44

Slippery Slope Arguments 44

Beneficence 45
 Paternalism..... 46
 Second Victim Phenomenon 46
 Justice..... 48
 Social Justice 48
 The Patient Protection and Affordable
 Care Act 49
 Professional–Patient Relationships 51
 Unavoidable Trust 51
 Human Dignity 51
 Patient Advocacy 52
 Moral Suffering 52
 Ethical Dilemmas 54
 Introduction to Critical Thinking and Ethical
 Decision Making 55
 Critical Thinking 55
 Moral Imagination..... 56
 The High, Hard Ground and the
 Swampy, Low Ground..... 58
 Reflective Practice 58
 The Four Topics Approach to Ethical Decision
 Making 60
 The Healthcare Team 62

**Chapter 3 Ethics in Professional
 Nursing Practice 67**

Introduction to Nursing Ethics 68
 Professional Codes of Ethics in Nursing..... 70
 ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses 71
 ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses 72
 Common Threads Between the
 ANA and ICN Codes..... 72
 Professional Boundaries in Nursing..... 72
 Ideal Nursing Ethical Competencies..... 75
 Moral Integrity..... 75
 Moral Distress 76
 Honesty 77
 Truthfulness and Truthtelling..... 78
 *Withholding Information
 from Patients*..... 78
 Benevolence..... 79
 Wisdom 81
 Moral Courage 82

Communication..... 84
 Mindfulness..... 84
 Effective Listening..... 86
 Concern..... 86
 Advocacy..... 86
 Power..... 87
 Culturally Sensitive Care 88
 Nursing Professional Relationships 91
 Nurse–Physician Relationships..... 91
 Nurse–Nurse Relationships 91
 *Horizontal Violence
 and Wounded Healers* 93
 *Improving Nurse–Nurse
 Relationships*..... 94
 Nurses and Social Media 94
 Moral Spaces and Blurred Lines..... 94
 Social Media, Email,
 and Cell Phones..... 95
 Benefits of Using Social Media 95
 Perils of Using Social Media 95
 Actual Cases of Violations 96
 Strategies for Using Social Media 98

**PART II Nursing Ethics Across
 the Life Span 105**

**Chapter 4 Reproductive Issues
 and Nursing Ethics 107**

Introduction to Ethics in Reproductive
 Health 108
 Reproductive Health..... 108
 Moral Standing of Humans 109
 Potentiality View..... 110
 Biological View 111
 Interests View..... 111
 Maternal–Fetal Conflict..... 112
 Conflict of Rights Issues..... 113
 Reproductive Rights 113
 Civil Liberties and Legal Decisions 113
 Abortion 115
 Federal Abortion Ban Preventing
 Partial-Birth Abortion..... 116

Pro-Choice Versus Pro-Life Views 117
Pro-Choice View 117
Pro-Life View 119
 Speaking Out 120
 Reproductive Technology 122
 Ethical Issues of Reproductive
 Technology 123
 Issues of Other Reproductive Services 125
 Genetic Screening and Testing 126
 Maternal Substance Abuse 127
 Nursing Care of Childbearing Women 128

**Chapter 5 Infant and Child
 Nursing Ethics 133**

Mothering 133
 Foundations of Trust 134
 Vaccinations 135
 Undocumented Immigrant Children 138
 Global Problems of Childhood Poverty
 and Infectious Diseases 139
 Abused and Neglected Children 141
 Surrogate Decision Making 143
 Withholding Information
 from Children 143
 Refusal of Treatment 144
 Impaired and Critically Ill Children 145
 Quality of Life 145
 Withholding and Withdrawing
 Treatment 146
 1971: Johns Hopkins Cases 147
 1984: Child Abuse Amendments
 (Baby Doe Rules) 147
 Baby Jane Doe: Kerri-Lynn 148
 1993: In the Matter of Baby K 150
 The Influence of Nurses: Character 150

**Chapter 6 Adolescent Nursing
 Ethics 155**

The Age of Adolescence 155
 Ethical Issues and Concerns Involving
 Adolescents 156
 Adolescent Relationships and
 Communication 157

Confidentiality, Privacy, and Trust 157
 *Trust–Privacy–Confidentiality
 Dilemma* 158
 Limits of Confidentiality 159
 Respect for Autonomy and Consent
 Process 160
 Covid-19 Vaccines for Adolescents,
 Autonomy, Nonmaleficence,
 and Beneficence 161
 *Monitoring Systems and Side
 Effects* 161
 *The Ethics of Covid-19 Vaccines and
 Adolescents* 162
 Adolescent Health Risk Behaviors,
 Nonmaleficence, and Beneficence 163
 Prevention Education for Adolescent
 Health Risk Behaviors 165
 *Abstinence-Only Programs or
 Comprehensive Sex Education
 Programs* 166
 Pregnancy and Abortion Related to
 Unprotected Sex 168
 HPV, HPV Vaccines and Benefits, HIV,
 and other STDs Related to
 Unprotected Sex 169
 HPV Infections 169
 HPV Vaccines and Benefits 169
 HIV Infection 170
 Other STDs 172
 Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse
 Related to Adolescents 172
 Eating Disorders Related to
 Adolescents 174
 Sexual Abuse Related to Adolescents 175
 Depression and Suicide Ideation
 Related to Adolescents 176
 Facing Death 178
 Losing a Loved One 178
 *Adolescents Facing Their Own
 Deaths* 179
 Nursing Care of Adolescents 179
 Trustworthiness 180
 Genuineness 180
 Compassion 180
 Honesty 180
 Spiritual Considerations 181

Chapter 7 Adult Health Nursing Ethics..... 187

Medicalization..... 187
 Compliance, Adherence, and
 Concordance 188
 Valuing Self-Determination in a
 Medicalized Environment 189
 Cultural Views on Medicalization
 and Treatment Regimens 190
 Chronic Disease and Illness 191
 Ethical Concerns and Suffering 193
 Providing Ethical Care 194
 Organ Transplantation 195
 Organ Transplant Ethical Issues
 During the Early Years..... 196
 Organ Procurement 196
 Fair Allocation of Organs..... 197
 Ethical Issues of Death and the
 Dead Donor Rule 197
 Nurses and Organ Donors 200

Chapter 8 Ethics and the Nursing Care of Elders 203

Aging in America..... 203
 Life Meaning and Significance 205
 The Search for Meaning 206
 Updating the Eriksonian Life Cycle..... 207
 Moral Agency 208
 Decisional Capacity..... 208
 Autonomy and Paternalism 209
 Vulnerability and Dependence..... 211
 Dementia 211
 Virtues Needed by Elders 212
 Courage..... 212
 Humility..... 213
 Patience..... 213
 Simplicity..... 213
 Benignity..... 213
 Integrity..... 213
 Wisdom 213
 Detachment and Nonchalance 214
 Courtesy 214

Hilarity 214
 Quality of Life..... 215
 Assessing the Capacity to Remain at Home 217
 Long-Term Care 218
 Elder Abuse 220
 Humanistic Nursing Care of Elders 221

Chapter 9 Ethical Issues in End-of-Life Nursing Care..... 225

What Is Death? 226
 The Ideal Death..... 227
 The Concept of Human Suffering
 of Dying Patients..... 228
 Responsibility of Nurses Toward
 Suffering Patients 229
 Euthanasia 229
 Salvageability and Unsalvageability
 Principle 231
 Historical Influences on the Definition
 of Death 231
 The Definition of Death..... 232
 Decisions About Death and Dying 234
 Advance Directives 234
 Surrogate Decision Makers 235
 Medical Futility 237
 Palliative Care..... 240
 The Right to Die and the Right to
 Refuse Treatment 240
 Withholding and Withdrawing
 Life-Sustaining Treatment 241
 Alleviation of Pain and Suffering
 in the Dying Patient..... 244
 Rule of Double Effect 245
 Terminal Sedation 245
 Physician-Assisted Suicide 246
 Rational Suicide 246
 Care for Dying Patients 248
 Compassionate Nurses and Dying
 Patients..... 250
 Physical and Emotional Pain
 Management 250
 Types of Pain 250
 Spiritual Considerations 251

PART III Special Issues 257

Chapter 10 Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing Ethics259

Characteristics of Psychiatric Nursing..... 259

A Value-Laden Specialty 260

The Practice Area of Mental Health: Unique

 Characteristics 262

 Ethical Implications of Diagnosis..... 263

 Anosognosia 266

 Stigma 266

Advocacy..... 267

Boundaries 269

 Whose Needs Are Being Served?..... 270

Privacy, Confidentiality, and Privileged

 Communication 271

 Privacy 271

 Confidentiality..... 273

 Privileged Communication 273

Decisional Capacity..... 274

 Statutory Authority to Treat..... 274

 Competence and Informed Consent..... 275

 Psychiatric Advance Directives..... 275

 Person-Centered Approach..... 276

 Humanistic Nursing Practice Theory 276

 Human-to-Human Relationship

 Model 277

 Recognizing Inherent Human

 Possibilities 277

Chapter 11 Public Health Nursing Ethics281

Introduction..... 281

Setting the Stage: Public Health Is

 Controversial..... 282

Ethical Theories and Approaches to

 Public Health..... 288

 Kantian Ethics (Deontology) 288

 Utilitarianism (Consequentialism) 288

 Communitarian Ethics..... 288

 Social Justice 290

Virtue Ethics: Just Generosity..... 291

Health Disparities..... 292

The Precautionary Principle..... 294

Environmental Justice 295

Ethical Reflections 296

Communicable Diseases..... 296

 Malaria 298

 Tuberculosis..... 298

 HIV/AIDS 299

 HIV Testing 300

 Pandemics: Influenza and Covid-19 302

The Mann Gulch Fire 308

Utilitarianism 309

Communitarianism 310

Respect for Autonomy..... 310

Beneficence 312

Justice..... 313

Terrorism and Disasters 313

Genomics 315

Public Health Nursing: Contributing

 to Building the World 317

 Service Learning..... 317

 Servant Leadership 318

Chapter 12 Ethics in Organizations and Leadership325

Organizational Ethics 325

 Organizational Culture and the Ethical

 Climate 326

Organizational Integrity and Trust..... 327

 Jennings’s Seven Signs of Organizational

 Ethical Collapse 329

Pressure to Maintain Numbers..... 329

Fear and Silence 329

Young ’Uns and a Bigger-than-

Life CEO 329

Weak Board..... 329

Conflicts..... 330

Innovation Like No Other 330

Goodness in Some Areas Atones for

Evil in Others 330

Compliance and Ethics

 Programs 330

Occupational Fraud and Abuse 331

Conflicts of Interest 331
Healthcare Fraud 334
Leadership Ethics 337
 Normative Leadership Theories 337
 Servant Leaders 338
 Transformational Leaders 338
Authentic Leaders 339
Leader Challenges 339
Using Power to Achieve Leader Success .. 341
 Collaboration 342
 Quality 342
 Leader Succession Planning 342

Appendix A: Case Studies **343**
Appendix B: ICN Code of Ethics **371**
**Appendix C: Mississippi Advance
Directive Planning for
Important Healthcare Decisions
Caring Connections** **405**
Glossary **425**
Index **437**

Preface

Rules and theories matter little without the formation of good character.

We are honored by our book's popularity among nurse educators, students, and other nurses. Our highest compliments came from two users of the previous editions: "I have never found anyone who said it better than Butts and Rich" and "You provide one of the best and most accessible overviews for students of how the common 4-principles framework can be both sensitive to many of the issues that care ethics raises and compatible with the development of particular ethical competencies in nursing practice." We hope readers will find the *Sixth Edition* an even better resource for teaching and learning nursing ethics.

The profession of nursing is experiencing one of the most important eras in its history. Although nurses are experiencing new and unique difficulties in their practice, they have more autonomy than ever before. With autonomy comes responsibility. For the front cover, we chose a picture focused on Zen rocks precariously balanced. The rocks stand before what we believe symbolizes a swampy low ground like the ground described by Schön (1987), which is described in Chapter 2. Nurses work in a world of ethical dilemmas with frustrating and heart-breaking conditions. However, we believe they need to aim toward maintaining equanimity, meaning maintaining an evenness of temperament particularly in difficult circumstances. We hope the content in our book will help nurses and students cultivate equanimity and the virtues needed to bring a healthy moral climate to their practice.

▶ American Association of Colleges of Nursing Recommendations in 2021

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing's (AACN's) *The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education* (2021) recommends an inclusion of a comprehensive range of nursing ethics and ethical decision-making strategies in nursing curricula. The AACN's (2021) view of ethics is embedded throughout the Essentials document with a global idea of transforming nursing to a new social order for the goal of advancing the discipline of nursing. The AACN stated:

A new social order may be necessary in which scientists, theorists, and practitioners work together to address questions related to the interplay of big data and nursing theory. Nursing graduates . . . must be well-prepared to think ethically, conceptually, and theoretically to better inform nursing care. Students must not only be introduced to the knowledge and values of the discipline, but they must be guided to practice from a disciplinary perspective—by seeing patients through the lens of wholeness and interconnectedness . . . (p. 3)

Several concepts are "interrelated and interwoven within the domains and competencies"

of the Essentials document to make up the foundation for student learning (AACN, 2021, p. 12). One of those interrelated concepts is ethics. The AACN posed the question, “Can you imagine having a conversation about population health [for instance] without considering ethics and health policy?” (p. 12).

Principles of ethics in medical and health care include autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice. The application of these principles steers students and nurses to make sound moral choices in practice. The AACN integrated ethics into its domains, competencies, and sub-competencies for entry-level professional nursing education and advanced-level nursing education. AACN’s entry-level ethical competencies pertaining to our book include:

Domain 1, Sub-Competency 1.2e	Demonstrate ethical decision making
Domain 3, Sub-Competency 3.1i	Identify ethical principles to protect the health and safety of diverse populations.
Domain 9, Sub-Competencies 9.1a, 9.1c, and 9.1e	9.1a-Apply principles of professional nursing ethics and human rights in patient care and professional situations. 9.1c-Demonstrate ethical behaviors in practice. 9.1e-Report unethical behaviors when observed.
Domain 9, Sub-Competency 9.2c	Demonstrate empathy to the individual’s life experience.
Domain 9, Sub-Competency 9.5d	Demonstrate ethical comportment and moral courage in decision making and actions.

Some of the moral issues nurses encounter daily leave nurses to manage ethical decisions and actions in a swampy low ground of uncertainties. When nurses become bogged down in ethical situations, such as global pandemics, death, abortion, or saving premature infants, nurses will most likely experience moral distress. Nurses must be prepared to attach their own meanings to life and death. Nursing students and practicing nurse clinicians need to acquire foundational knowledge about ethics, ethical reasoning, and decision-making strategies to prepare them for the ethical issues they will encounter daily. Included in this book are decision-making approaches and models, rationale for decisions, and various topics about ethical patient care.

► **NCLEX-RN® Test Plan for 2019**

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing’s 2019 *NCLEX-RN® Test Plan* applies the goal of nursing care, which is “preventing illness and potential complications; protecting, promoting, restoring, and facilitating comfort, health and dignity in dying” (p. 4). Examples of the integration of ethics into the test plan include the following:

- **NCLEX-RN Test Plan: Safe and Effective Care Environment—Ethical Practice (pp. 8-12)**
 - Recognizing ethical dilemmas and taking appropriate action
 - Inform others (clients, staff) of ethical issues affecting client care
 - Use the ANA Code of Ethics (2015) consistently as a guideline for practice
 - Evaluate outcomes to promote continued improvement of ethical practice
- **NCLEX-RN Test Plan: Psychosocial Integrity (p. 21-25)**
 - End-of-life care includes client coping, identifying client needs, recognizing the need for support, assisting in resolution of end-of-life issues,

- and providing end-of-life care and education
- Grief and loss includes providing care for clients with grief or loss, supporting anticipatory grieving, informing client of expected reactions to grief or loss, providing resources for adjusting to grief or loss, and evaluating coping and fears
 - Religious and spiritual influences on health includes identifying client emotional and spiritual issues and needs, assessing factors affecting care, assessing and planning emotional and spiritual needs, evaluating if the client's spiritual needs are met

► Purposes and Readership

We have four purposes for this book. First, we wanted to provide a nursing ethics book that covers a wide array of ethical issues in nursing. We included bioethical issues nurses encounter every day—the ones Fry and Veatch (2000) stated are the “flesh and blood” issues (p. 1)—but we also covered issues from a humanistic perspective. In the body of the text, we included theoretical foundations, the most current scholarly literature and clinical evidence, related news briefs, research notes, ethical reflections, and legal perspectives surrounding ethics topics.

Second, a prominent feature of this book is its “across the curriculum” format for undergraduate nursing students. The book can be used as a supplementary textbook in each nursing course. We believe that if ethical concepts and bioethical issues are integrated in the beginning of nursing programs and throughout curricula, students will become more mindful of the myriad of ethical challenges they will face in practice and then become habituated to resolving conflicts ethically. Ultimately, we believe nurses with knowledge of ethics will want to find ways to participate in the large-scale bioethical deliberations and

decision making regarding their patients' and families' life and death issues.

As a third purpose, RN to BSN students also can use this book in their curricula, especially in ethics, professional development, or leadership courses. Even though RN to BSN students bring a wealth of real flesh-and-blood experiences with them to share in the classroom, they often return to school without substantial exposure to ethics classes or ethical content.

The last part of the book's title, “Into Practice,” is related to the book's fourth purpose. Nurses' work *is* nursing ethics. The content of the book will stimulate the moral imagination of nurses so they can integrate ethical principles, theories, and decision-making skills into their everyday practice.

► Comments and Feedback

We are dedicated to making this book the one that will meet your needs for the future. We are interested in your comments about the book. Please email us at Janie Butts at jbbdsn1998@gmail.com or Karen Rich at karenrich11470@gmail.com with feedback or questions concerning the book, questions about ethics, or any questions you may have regarding the case studies in Appendix A or the multiple choice questions in the instructor's materials. We continue to appreciate your positive support!

► References

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