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Abstract

Ethical Issues Faced by Registered Nurses at Selected Public Clinics of Mopani District, Limpopo Province, South Africa †

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Background: Ethics is an integral part of the nursing profession, forming the foundation thereof. Nursing ethics, therefore, is the foundation of ethical decision-making, aimed at informing nursing practitioners and the public of the ethical and moral principles applicable to nurse practitioners in the performance of their duties. Objective: This study explored and described the ethical issues faced by registered nurses in the selected public clinics of Mopani district in the Limpopo province. Methods: This study had a qualitative–explorative–descriptive study design. The study was conducted in selected public clinics of the greater Giyani municipalities in the Mopani district of the Limpopo province. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 registered nurses, with a focus on the ethical challenges that they encounter during patient care. All participants had more than five years working at the selected clinics and were between 25 and 60 years. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations were taken throughout the study. Results: The registered nurses were found to be guided by the ethical and moral principles related to the performance of their duties. However, incidences of unethical behaviour were revealed in this study; these include doing harm to the patients by applying the incorrect vaccination technique and giving incorrect medication, as well as a lack of respect for patients' dignity by sometimes exchanging harsh words with the patients, interfering with their religious and cultural believes, or breaching confidentiality by divulging patients' diagnosis. Furthermore, balancing patient autonomy with medical advice and maintaining confidentiality while ensuring patient and public safety sometimes poses dilemmas to registered nurses. Moral distress arises when nurses feel unable to act in accordance with their values due to institutional constraints. Conclusions: Registered nurses must have a high level of respect for all individuals and act with dignity in their care and communication. It is important that patients' families are also treated with respect, due to their relationship to the patient. Registered nurses must understand the ethical and professional guidelines regarding communication when working with colleagues and patients.

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