

Position Statements

Constituent/State Nurses Associations (C/SNAs) as Ethics Resources, Educators, and Advocates

Date: November 11, 2011
Status: Revised Position Statement
Originated by: ANA Center for Ethics and Human Rights
Adopted by: ANA Board of Directors

Purpose: The purpose of this position statement is to provide information to constituent and/state nurses associations (C/SNAs) that will enable them to support, educate, and mentor their members regarding available resources to assist nurses in recognizing, assessing, and intervening in ethical dilemmas in all practice settings, including patient care, education, research, and administration. Nurses are individually accountable to practice in accordance with ethical principles using moral courage whenever serving patients. Collaboration with nurse colleagues to build a foundation for ethically sound practice will support them in difficult situations when taking a controversial ethical stand alone would be nearly impossible.

Statement of ANA Position: The American Nurses Association (ANA) believes that the C/SNAs serve as vital resources for nurses and the profession on issues related to ethics and human rights. ANA supports the development of mechanisms by C/SNAs to promote the ethical competence of nurses, the integration of ANA's *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* into daily practice, and nurse advocacy for human rights, dignity, and cultural sensitivity.

History/Previous Position Statements: The clinical care of patients and families across all health care settings and the ethical issues in clinical practice impacting the delivery of care are escalating in complexity, diversity, and significance. Rapid scientific and technologic advances, new diagnostic and treatment methods, and changing health care delivery environments have created new ethical uncertainties and human rights challenges. Now, more than ever before, the types of ethical problems nurses encounter in daily practice impose new demands on nurses to be expertly knowledgeable in recognizing, assessing, and intervening in these situations. The role of the clinical ethics consultant has, is, and will be at the forefront of guiding patients, families, and, particularly, providers toward resolution of these challenging issues through education, consultation, collaboration, and application of evidence-based research findings. Nurses play an essential role in the consultative process surrounding ethical dilemmas and, as such, must have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to actively participate in this process as both patient advocates and key members of the interdisciplinary health care team. Nurses must promote the advancement of human rights precepts and protect against human rights violations.

ANA encourages C/SNAs to develop mechanisms that provide education, consultation, policy development, and information (e.g. position statements) that will assist nurses in addressing ethical and human rights issues in daily practice across all roles and in all settings, including public health. These services may be directed to nurses individually and collectively, to internal units (C/SNAs), and to the public. C/SNAs may also consider developing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the conduct of nurses. The mechanisms through which these and other services are provided may be by ethics and human rights committees or by delegation to existing officials or units of the C/SNA. Individuals with expertise in the area of ethics and human rights can serve as valuable resources in the development of these mechanisms. Through such mechanisms nurses can improve and build on their ethical competence, thus more boldly laying claim to nursing's moral obligations.

Supportive Material:

1. *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics for Nurses*

Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice (2010) defines *nursing* as “the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations” (ANA, 2010, p.1).

Standard 7 of this document states “the registered nurse practices ethically.” This Standard outlines competencies to measure nurses’ integration of ethics when providing care, including elements such as “the registered nurse uses *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* (ANA, 2001) to guide practice,”... “Delivers care in a manner that preserves and protects health care consumer autonomy, dignity, rights, values and beliefs,” and “Assists health care consumers in self-determination and informed decision-making” (ANA, 2010, p. 47).

ANA’s *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* (2001) explicates the values and ethical precepts of the profession and provides guidance for conduct and relationships in carrying out nursing actions. It is within the framework of the Code and professional standards that nurses make ethical decisions and discharge their responsibilities. The central axiom that directs the profession is respect for persons. This respect extends to and encompasses patients, families, nurse colleagues, and other team members.

2. *ANA Center for Ethics and Human Rights*

The ANA Center for Ethics and Human Rights was established in September 1990 to:

- Promulgate a body of knowledge in collaboration with ANA constituents, both theoretical and practical, designed to address issues in ethics and human rights at the state, national, and international levels;

- Develop and disseminate information about and advocate for public policy to ensure that ethics and human rights are addressed in health care; and
- Ensure that short- and long-range objectives regarding ethics and human rights will be addressed within ANA and expressed to appropriate bodies external to the Association.

The Center remains responsive to changing realities within health care and the nursing profession and is committed to addressing professional, ethical, and human rights challenges toward improving the quality and outcomes of care provided to patients and families.

The Center's Advisory Board is a deliberative body of experts nominated by their C/SNA then appointed by the ANA Board of Directors. These experts as a group provide guidance to the Center concerning issues of current ethical concern to nursing practice, education, research, administration, and other matters relating to the mission and goals of the Center and ANA. The Advisory Board makes recommendations for review, revision, and/or development of policies, position statements, and/or guidelines in support of nurses' roles in ethical and human rights and patient advocacy to the ANA Board of Directors.

The Center regularly receives calls from nurses seeking advice on specific cases, references, citations, and summaries of current literature. This request for consultation is not meant to imply that individual nurses abdicate their moral conscience; on the contrary, the service is available to facilitate the nurse's individual moral agency. ANA organizational units receive consultation, dissemination of pertinent information on an ongoing basis, as well as assistance in ensuring that ethical and human rights issues are addressed throughout the organization.

Through the Center, ANA—in collaboration with the American Medical Association and the National Human Genome Research Institute—created the National Coalition for Health Professional Education in Genetics (NCHPG). NCHPG aims to provide an organized, systematic, and national approach to the provision of genetics education for all health care professionals. The coalition is comprised of leaders from approximately 50 diverse health care professional organizations, consumer and voluntary groups, government agencies, private industries, managed care organizations, and genetic professional societies. Using Nursing’s Agenda for Health Care Reform (ANA 2008?) as a basis, the ANA Ethics Center tracks human rights and ethics issues in health care initiatives and the impact on the profession of nursing.

Nurses may access information about the Center, its Advisory Board, and a wide range of online resources offered through the Center the by selecting the link “Nursing Ethics” on ANA’s official website, <http://www.nursingworld.org>. Some of these resources include information related to ANA’s 2001 *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*, center activities, policy development, spiritual and religious issues, medical ethics and patient’s rights, sources for older adults, government agencies, end-of-life issues, caregiving, bioethics, and bioethics defense.

Recommendations: C/SNAs may provide ethics education and related resources to its members and the community in the following ways:

- Facilitate the dissemination of ANA’s *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* to student nurses, clinical nurses, nursing faculty, nurse researchers, nurse administrators, other health professionals, and the general public.

- Develop and implement educational programs about the ethical and human rights dimensions of practice in any setting where nurses practice, learn, teach, research, and lead both domestically and globally and nurses' role in ethical decision-making in health care.
- Support nurses in the development of institutional- and/or agency-based ethics and human rights resources, including ethics committees, ethics consultation, and education programs.
- Promote the active participation of nurses in formal processes of ethical deliberation and multidisciplinary ethics committees.
- Provide networking forums for discussion and dissemination of information at state, national, and international levels for nurses, other health professionals, and the public, related to ethical and human rights issues in health care, bioethics and human rights centers, literary resources, and individuals with expertise in the specialty of ethics and ethics consultation.
- Serve as a resource for individuals or groups exploring health care ethics and human rights issues in institutions, communities, and political arenas.
- Develop or recommend revisions of ANA and/or C/SNA position statements, policies, or guidelines related to ethics and human rights.
- Use established processes for reporting and handling incompetent, unethical, and illegal practices.

- Use ANA resources including ANA position statements on Ethics and Human Rights, online resources, and publications to act as consultants to members, State Boards of Nursing, health departments, and other regulatory agencies and interested parties in upholding ANA's *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*, understanding the ethical and human rights precepts of the profession and addressing ethical and human rights concerns nurses encounter their practice.

Summary: The nature and complexity of a rapidly changing health care system has increased the ethical and human rights issues and dilemmas encountered by nurses. C/SNAs must provide leadership, guidance, and support to their members through the development of mechanisms that enhance the ethical and human rights dimensions of nursing practice and the quality of care rendered to patients, families, and communities.

Supersedes: ANA Position Statement, *Mechanisms Through Which State Nurses Associations Consider Ethical and Human Rights Issues*. Effective date: 12/08/94

Status: Revised Position Statement

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Adopted by: ANA Board of Directors

Related Past Actions: 1984 House of Delegates Resolution; *Code for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*, 1985

References

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