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Article

An integrated ethical decision-making model for nurses

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**Abstract** The study reviewed 20 currently-available structured ethical decision-making models and developed an integrated model consisting of six steps with useful questions and tools that help better performance each step: (1) the identification of an ethical problem; (2) the collection of additional information to identify the problem and develop solutions; (3) the development of alternatives for analysis and comparison; (4) the selection of the best alternatives and justification; (5) the development of diverse, practical ways to implement ethical decisions and actions; and (6) the evaluation of effects and development of strategies to prevent a similar occurrence. From a pilot-test of the model, nursing students reported positive experiences, including being satisfied with having access to a comprehensive review process of the ethical aspects of decision making and becoming more confident in their decisions. There is a need for the model to be further tested and refined in both the educational and practical environments.

**Keywords**

decision making, ethics, ethical issues, nursing ethics, problem solving

**Introduction**

Patients' safety and well-being are dependent, to a large extent, on professionals' ethical decisions.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of his or her excellence in clinical knowledge and skills, a healthcare professional who has

low or non-existent ethical standards should be considered unfit to practice. For responsible healthcare,

professionals have to be competent in ethical decision making.<sup>2</sup> An ethical problem is 'as [an

ethical]

matter or issue that is difficult to deal with, solve, or overcome and which stands in need of a solution'

(p.94).<sup>3</sup> Ethical problems in a clinical setting are those we rarely confront in our daily lives, and ethical

norms learned from our parents or schools are not sufficient to resolve clinical ethical issues.

There are

concerns about professionals' ethical competency. Health professionals often adopt an inconsistent

decision-making process or reach inconsistent ethical conclusions in attempts to resolve identical ethical

problems.<sup>1,4,5</sup> Moreover, they tend to come to decisions of an ethical nature before reviewing all

possible alternatives or going through a systematic and comprehensive decision process.<sup>2</sup> It is

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