

Original Article

What is the Right Thing to Do: Use of a Relational Ethic Framework to Guide Clinical Decision-Making

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Abstract

Background: Answering the question “what is the right thing to do?” is, for most nurses and other healthcare professionals, an ethical question. Many decisions in healthcare are based on determining whether or not an action, or intervention, is to be taken. When a framework is used to help guide these decisions patient care can be improved. Relational ethics is an ethical framework that has been developed by an interdisciplinary team to help healthcare professionals answer ethical questions within complex environments. When applying this action ethic framework health professionals are guided to create the moral space where responsiveness and responsibility for yourself and the other is enacted and ethical questions answered.

Aims: The purpose of this article is to discuss and describe the core elements of Relational Ethics and to demonstrate how a relational ethics framework can be used to facilitate ethical healthcare decision-making.

Method: A clinical exemplar, drawn from a mental health nursing setting, is used to demonstrate how a relational ethic framework can be applied within a clinical healthcare context.

Results: Through the use of a relational ethics framework the essential core elements of Relational Ethics are applied which resulted in ethically reflective healthcare decision-making.

Conclusions: Clinicians are able to directly apply an ethical framework to their healthcare practice. Additionally, Relational Ethics is a promising action ethic which can be used to create the moral space needed to enact ethical decision-making.

Key Words: Relational ethics, Relational practice, Ethics, Relationship Centred Care, Patient Centred Care, Clinical Decision-making