



THE ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR CARE OF THE ELDERLY



INTRODUCTION

Rapid ageing of world's population results in changes in healthcare systems around the world. Between 2000 and 2050 the proportion of the world's population aged 60 years or over will double from about 11% to 22% (WHO, 2016). The elderly may soon become the biggest social group in majority of countries in Europe. Such reconfiguration in populations has to be accommodated for and medical professionals need to broaden their knowledge and work out new solutions concerning the care of the elderly and healthy and active ageing. Moreover, the elderly is cared for in every medical and social setting, what urges the need of professional development of nurses and other medical personnel in this scope.

Ethical aspects should be more discussed and main ethical principles when caring for the elderly should be highlighted, especially in the context of age discrimination which is considered as a very big problem (Ripon, 2014).

Taking the above into account, four partners of an international project Healthy Lifestyle for Ageing Well (HLAW) endeavoured to establish ethical guidelines for nursing care of the elderly in all settings where nursing care is provided.

AIM

The aim of HLAW's ethical guidelines proposal is to inform nurses, nursing students and society about the core ethical principles which should be always followed when caring of the elderly.

APPROACH

Two steps were undertaken in preparation of the ethical guidelines proposal:

(1) The main ethical values and principles included in four codes of ethics for nurses (Polish, Slovenian, Portuguese and Finnish codes of ethics) were indicated and analysed in the light of nursing care of the elderly by students from Poland, Slovenia, Portugal and Finland working during HLAW project Intensive Programme 23.05.2016- 03.06.2016 organized in Celje (Slovenia) under supervision of teachers.

(2) Values and principles when caring of the elderly which were indicated during workshop were synthesised and confronted with the project researchers' analysis of five codes of ethics (additionally ICN code was considered).

Analysed Documents:

- (1) The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses, 2012;
- (2) The Code of Ethics in nursing, Slovenia, 2014;
- (3) Ethical Guidelines of Nursing, Finnish Nurses Association, 1996;
- (4) The Code of Professional Ethics for the Polish Nurse and Midwife, 2003;
- (5) Deontologia Profissional de Enfermagem, Ordem Dos Enfermeiros, 2015.

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THE PROPOSAL OF HLAW'S ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR CARE OF THE ELDERLY

PRINCIPLE I.



EVERY ELDERLY SHOULD BE PERCEIVED AS A UNIQUE PERSON WITH SPECIFIC PHYSICAL, PSYCHO-SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS

- The bio-psycho-social, cultural and spiritual integrity of the elderly should be protected.
- Nurses are obliged to protect each elderly's life and to provide care maintaining its highest quality.
- Nurses act to empower people in all health states.
- Every elderly is a unique human being characterized by his own set of needs. Diversity and uniqueness of the elderly should always be respected and patients' individuality protected.
- The elderly should have the possibility to decide about the place of being cared of as well as about the person who will provide this care.
- In order to minimize the risk of age discrimination, elderly patients should be safeguarded by nurses in all settings where care is provided. Any discrimination should immediately be reported and reacted against.
- Nurses should always remember that, due to their age limitations, the elderly need more patience and understanding than average-aged patients. Therefore, nurses should pay more attention to practical aspects of care of the elderly and take into account impairments such as: poor eyesight, hearing impairment, speech impairment, poor memory, problems with mobility and many other conditions present in older age.

PRINCIPLE II.



EVERY ELDERLY SHOULD HAVE THE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY NURSING CARE

- Nurses should maintain high level of knowledge and skills in work with the elderly in different settings by constantly developing their competences.
- High quality of care of the elderly is possible when it is evidence-based.
- Nurses should be encouraged to do research about widely understood well-being of the elderly with the aim to support their healthy and active ageing.
- Elderly patients can greatly benefit from modern devices that can be helpful in their everyday life. Nurses should acquaint themselves with knowledge about technological advancements, IT solutions, electronics and other solutions and promote those that can improve the quality of life of their elderly patients.
- The key element of high quality of care of the elderly and promotion of healthy and active ageing is cooperation with other professionals and multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral team work.

PRINCIPLE III.



EVERY ELDERLY'S AUTONOMY AND THE RIGHT TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS SHOULD BE RESPECTED

- Using their knowledge and experience, nurses should help the patients make informed decisions and supervise if the patient's preferences are respected by the personnel and the family/guardians.
- In contact with the patients all information should be clear and understandable, without any medical jargon. Elderly patients should be given the right to participate in all decision making processes, their feedback should always be taken into consideration and their right to choose respected at all times.
- Patients should be patiently informed about all activities undertaken and about accessible equipment which can be helpful in healthy and active ageing.
- Nurses should support patients' freedom, autonomy and their independence by ensuring their right to second opinion. Nurses should wait for patients' consent and respect their decisions.
- Nurses should also protect fair and equal access to health care and act against any abuse or discrimination directed at an elderly person by reporting its every occurrence.



PRINCIPLE IV.



EVERY ELDERLY'S DIGNITY AND PRIVACY SHOULD BE RESPECTED

- Nurses should promote environment in which elderly patients feel safe and their dignity and human rights are fully protected.
- Compassionate attitude towards the elderly, open and caring communication, respecting patient's privacy and his right to confidentiality are of the utmost importance.
- Nurses should always remember about kindness and respectful approach to elderly patients who, due to their health condition, sometimes need more understanding and sensitivity than usual.