Moral responsibility in nursing practice: a nurse student perspective

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Nursing practice involves a moral dimension because of the overarching aim to ensure the wellbeing of persons in need of professional care. Meeting the patient is meeting another human being who is vulnerable, who trusts professionals and whose life can be influenced in a significant way. This assumes a responsibility of a special kind toward this other human being. This responsibility plays a significant role for health care professionals and is demanding to deal with. Although, The International Council of Nurses’ (ICN) Code of Ethics provides an ethical standard for nurses’ responsibilities towards the patient; clinical competence, respect for the life and dignity of the patient and non-discrimination of patients it is the responsibility of the individual nurse to decide what and how to act in the particular situation. Research findings has shown that nurses sense of falling short to do what they think they should, evokes feelings of guilt and inadequacy and is related to moral stress and burn out.

It was therefore considered important to explore nurse students’ reflections on the phenomenon of moral responsibility in nursing practice. Then it is during clinical practice they are confronted with the demand of moral responsibility.

Findings from the research might have significance to make the meaning of moral responsibility salient. Further insights gained from nurse students experiences of the moral dimension and moral responsibility can be of value for nurse education in understanding how nurse students and new nurses can be supported in enacting their moral responsibility in a way that preserves health.

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