



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Message from the President

Code of Ethics for Nurses Guides Professional Accountability

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Reinvesting in your potential...it's not just a slogan or theme to embrace for a year. It is an obligation nurses have to themselves, their peers, their patients and their workplace. Over the past year, I have read a number of books or articles related to personal or professional potential. Accountability is a recurring concept found in the writings: accountability for one's actions, one's profession, and one's life. Research on nursing accountability kept taking me back to the American Nurses Association's (ANA) *Code of Ethics for Nurses With Interpretive Statements*.¹ After retrieving a copy of the Code of Ethics from the Center for Nursing Excellence at my facility, I found it to be more than statements about a nurse's ethical and moral obligations to patients or society. This document outlined the primary goals and values of our nursing profession through its nine provisions and associated interpretive statements.

Establishing a Code

The "Nightingale Pledge", believed to be the first code of ethics, was written in 1893 by Lystra Gretter as an adaptation of the Hippocratic Oath.² The Code of Ethics evolved from Gretter's work. It wasn't until 1950 that the Code for Professional Nurses was officially adopted by the ANA House of Delegates.¹ The first three provisions describe the fundamental values and obligations of the nurse to his or her patients. The next three provide boundaries for a nurse's duties and loyalty. The final three provisions address more global or professional duties such as social reform and advancing the profession of nursing.³

One statement in the "Nightingale Pledge" reads, "I will do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession..."² This serves as the basis for provisions that highlight nurses' obligations (accountability) to self, the nursing profession and its organizations. For this discussion, I would like to focus on the perianesthesia nurse's duty to self because it is directly related to potential.

Provision 5 asserts that a "nurse owes the same responsibility to self as to others, including the responsibility to preserve integrity and safety, to maintain competence, and to continue personal and professional growth."² The foundation of this provision is self-respect and the integration of personal and professional values to achieve professional excellence. Professional excellence is dependent upon maintaining updated knowledge and skills through continuing education, networking with colleagues, and critical thinking.

Accountability and Growth

In 1999, ASPAN developed Perianesthesia Standards for Ethical Practice to help perianesthesia nurses recognize their accountability to patients, society and self and encourage nurses to maintain a consistently high level of care by adhering to the *Standards of Perianesthesia Nursing Practice*.⁴ According to the Standards, the perianesthesia nurse is personally accountable for professional competency, accepts responsibility for nursing practice in all phases or levels of perianesthesia care, and incorporates evidence-based research into his or her practice.⁵

Professional growth and maintenance of competency may include attending continuing education programs or working toward a higher degree, such as a BSN, MSN or Doctorate. Utilizing a competency-based orientation and performance review process ensures that a perianesthesia nurse's practice will remain current. Achieving a CPAN® and/or CAPA® certification is another way the nurse can demonstrate to peers, patients and the public that he or she has made a commitment to continual

learning and professional growth. Such continual learning is not isolated to instructor-led classes, but includes varied activities that demonstrate the application of evidence-based practice. For example, learning and growth occurs when one is actively participating in performance improvement activities, reviewing and updating of facility policies, presenting lectures, or keeping involved in unit or hospital based councils or committees.

Pledge Integrity, Pursue Potential

Preservation of integrity and safety involves an integration of personal values with professional values. Nurses are called to serve patients regardless of their lifestyle, medical condition or culture. A threat to the nurse's integrity, such as falsifying a record in order to obtain insurance or Medicare reimbursement, may be possible in this turbulent economic environment. Organizations utilizing certain work-arounds or shortcuts to save money, supplies, or labor costs (e.g., not following ASPAN staffing recommendations to improve productivity outcomes) can jeopardize patient safety and the nurse's professional licensure.

It is imperative that nurses, coworkers, patients and families are treated with respect; therefore, the nurse has a responsibility to report inappropriate behavior or verbal abuse from any healthcare professional. The perianesthesia nurse should never accept compromise unless it preserves the well-being of the patient or nurse. Each of us is called to uphold the code of ethics for nursing in general, and specifically within perianesthesia nursing practice. Ethical decision-making entails maintaining an open dialogue among all caregivers regardless of a difference in opinion, and within appropriate professional boundaries. It is our duty to patients and colleagues to practice at the highest level possible and to consistently work toward achieving our greatest professional potential.

REFERENCES

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