

THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR NURSES

Japanese Nursing Association, 2003

PREAMBLE

People hope to stay healthy and happy while maintaining human dignity. The mission of nursing is to meet such universal needs of human-beings, and to contribute to the healthy lives of all people.

The purpose of nursing is to provide support to individuals of all ages, families, groups, and communities, with a view towards promoting health, preventing illness, recovering health, and relieving from suffering, so that people can live out their days according to their own values throughout their life.

Nurses are those who are authorized by nursing licensure to practice nursing. And to fulfill their social responsibility, they are required in such practice to respect human rights, including the right to life, dignity, and equal and respectful nursing care.

Japanese Nursing Association Code of Ethics for Nurses is a code of conduct for nurses practicing nursing at hospitals, in communities, at schools, at educational or research institutions, at administrative agencies, or in any place whatsoever and provides a benchmark for nurses at the time reviewing their own practice. It also specifies to society the scope of the responsibilities that nurses should take as professionals in practicing nursing.

THE CODE

1. Nurses respect human life, human dignity, and human rights.
2. Nurses provide nursing care to all people equally, regardless of their nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, faith, age, gender, sex and sexual orientation, social status, economic status, lifestyle, or the nature of their health problems.
3. Nurses build trusting relationships with people receiving care, and provide nursing care based on the relationship.
4. Nurses respect and protect the rights of people to information and self-determination.
5. Nurses honor confidentiality and strive for the protection of personal information, while using appropriate discretion in the sharing of this information.
6. Nurses protect and safeguard clients, when their care is inhibited or their safety is threatened.
7. Nurses clearly recognize their own responsibility and competence, and take their own responsibility for the nursing care they provide.
8. Nurses always strive to maintain and develop competence by continuous learning, as part of their own responsibility.

9. Nurses provide nursing care in collaboration with other nurses as well as healthcare and welfare personnel.
10. Nurses determine and implement desirable standards for nursing practice, management, education, and research, in order to provide quality nursing care.
11. Nurses endeavor to create and develop professional knowledge and skills through research and practice, and to contribute to the progress of nursing science.
12. Nurses strive to protect and promote their own physical and mental health in order to provide quality nursing care.
13. Nurses maintain high standards of personal conduct which enhance public confidence.
14. Nurses share with society the responsibility for environmental issues, so that people can obtain better health.
15. Nurses, through the professional organization, participate in establishing a system for quality nursing care and contribute to the development of a better society.

EXPOSITION

1. Nurses respect human life, human dignity, and human rights.

The basis of conduct of nurses is respect for human life and dignity. Nurses, as specialists who support the health and lives of people at hospitals, facilities, and other places, are often faced with very fundamental problems regarding life and death which require a high ethical level for their decisions and conduct.

Recent advance in science and technology have changed impossible medical interventions into the possible, while ever-growing medical expenses remain a national issue. These issues pose complex and difficult problems in bioethics and the equitable distribution of limited resources.

Nurses should stand on the basis of the protection of life, personality, and dignity anytime in making judgments and conducting themselves, should respect self-determination of people while securing access to information and opportunities for decision making, and should always treat people with warm personal thoughtfulness.

2. Nurses provide nursing care to all people equally, regardless of their nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, faith, age, gender, sex and sexual orientation, social status, economic status, lifestyle, or the nature of their health problems.

All people have an equal right to receive medical and nursing care. Equality in nursing does not mean to provide the same equal care to every person, but rather means to provide care according to the their individuality and needs. Nurses never discriminate against people based on their nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, faith, age, sex, sexual orientation (i.e. homosexual, heterosexual, etc), social status, economic status, lifestyle, or the nature of their health problems. Nurses also respect and accept the habits, attitudes, cultural backgrounds, and thoughts of individuals.

3. Nurses build trusting relationships with people receiving care, and provide care based on the relationship.

Nursing is delivered only on the basis of trusting relationships between nurses and clients. Nursing care fortified with advanced knowledge and skills can be effective only with such relationships. Therefore, nurses are responsible for initiating and developing good relationships with clients.

In the process of nursing care delivery, the active involvement of clients should be encouraged, so that their ideas and wishes can be reflected in the care. Nurses should make every effort to gain the confidence of clients, by providing sufficient explanations regarding their practice to obtain their understanding and consent, and by taking responsibility for the outcomes. In addition, nurses should watch over clients with tolerance, while focusing on and believing in the overt and latent capability of these people.

Moreover, nurses are obligated to be dedicated to the clients, and to do their utmost to be deserving of the confidence and reliance that these people have from the established relationship.

4. Nurses respect and protect the rights of people to information and self-determination.

People have the right to know about their own health conditions and the treatment to be given, and the right to choose medical and nursing care based on sufficient information. Nurses should ensure their access to information and opportunities for self-determination, in order to protect the right to information and self-determination of clients. When requests are made for the disclosure of medical records and/or nursing records, nurses should respond in good faith, in compliance with institutional or other guidelines.

To make decisions at their own discretion, it is necessary for people to have sufficient information, as well as assistance in understanding and accepting the implications of the information. Nurses should: provide intelligible explanations, while checking the disposition and comprehension of clients; create an environment in which such people can easily convey their intentions; and coordinate and encourage the cooperation of other healthcare/welfare personnel. Nurses should also act as advocates for the rights of clients, including speaking on their behalf, as appropriate.

In addition to self-choice based on sufficient information, self-determination may include cases where persons choose not to know or to leave a decision to someone else. Nurses should respect such intentions and personal choices, while encouraging and supporting these persons to face finding out the facts, and to make their own decisions as much as possible. In the end, it is most important to give support to ensure that the decision and choice that is made is in the best interest of the individual.

5. Nurses honor confidentiality and strive for the protection of personal information, while using appropriate discretion in the sharing of this information.

Nurses are likely to obtain personal information of clients regarding their physical, mental, and social conditions for the purpose of providing appropriately personalized nursing care. Nurses should clarify the utilization purpose before obtaining such information, and protect the confidentiality of any information obtained during professional conduct. Personal information, including medical records and nursing records must be treated with fastidious care, and precautions should be taken against the leakage of private information.

When information needs to be shared among healthcare/welfare personnel for the purpose of quality medical and nursing care, appropriate discretion should be used. It is desirable to give an explanation beforehand to people receiving care regarding what kind of information may be shared and why, and to obtain their consent. Even when information is shared with the family members of clients, prior consent needs to be sought to the greatest extent possible.

6. Nurses protect and safeguard clients, when their care is inhibited or their safety is threatened.

Nurses ensure that clients receive proper nursing care on a consistent basis. If treatment or nursing care is inhibited by healthcare/welfare personnel, or if any inappropriate judgment or conduct is noticed, nurses should work with related parties for the protection of these people or try to solve the problems using any proper means. If any risk to life or human rights should be identified, nurses must ask for an explanation, and/or refuse to perform duties, so as not to harm the clients.

Nurses should pay attention to and prevent any risk factors in the nursing setting, including the possibility that their own conduct can do harm to clients.

7. Nurses clearly recognize their own responsibility and competence, and take their own responsibility for the nursing care they provide.

Nurses should always recognize their own responsibilities and competence, and practice nursing accordingly. Nurses assume the responsibility of giving explanations regarding the nursing care they are going to provide, and fulfill accountability for their judgment, practices, and outcomes.

The scope of the responsibility of nurses is stipulated in the Act on Public Health Nurses, Midwives, and Nurses, and nurses should not practice nursing beyond the stipulated legal responsibility. When asked to perform practices beyond their competence, nurses should maintain the quality of care to be provided, by asking for assistance or guidance of other personnel proactively, or by asking to change the content of the practice. When delegating responsibility, nurses should use sound judgment regarding both their own competence and that of the individual to be delegated.

8. Nurses always strive to maintain and develop competence by continuous learning, as part of their own responsibility.

Nurses are required to have both a high level of expertise and a well-rounded education, so as to keep up with scientific and medical advances and to meet increasingly diverse health needs in accordance with changing social values. To respond to those requirements, nurses carry the responsibility and duty to maintain and develop their own competence by systematic continuous learning as professionals.

JNA provides a standard of continuing education, and offers various programs for nurses. Nurses should make the most of opportunities for continuing education, including training sessions prepared by prefectural nursing associations, academic conferences/workshops, and various seminars, in addition to in-service training programs at their facilities, and should pursue professional development.

9. Nurses provide nursing care in collaboration with other nurses as well as healthcare and welfare personnel.

Nurses should collaborate with each other based on the common value of providing the best for people receiving nursing and medical care. Based on this shared values, nurses should sustain co-operative relationships with co-workers in nursing and other healthcare/welfare staffs, and provide better nursing and medical care, utilizing each other's originality, ingenuity, and effort.

Also, nurses should try to build an autonomous, professional and equal relationship as professionals with co-workers in nursing and other healthcare/welfare fields. That is, they should understand each other's specialties and perform at their full potential in order to provide quality nursing and medical care.

10. Nurses determine and implement desirable standards for clinical nursing practice, management, education, and research, in order to provide quality nursing care.

It is an essential requirement for professionals to impose self-restriction by establishing and observing code of conduct. The standard of nursing practice should define the contents and means of nursing practice, standard of nursing management should define the organization, resource management, environmental arrangement, quality assurance programs, and continuous education required to realize the necessary nursing practice. The standard of nursing education should define the contents and environment of the education, while the standard of research should define the research contests and an estimation of their priorities, research methodologies, and procedures for publishing research results.

Such standards should be established in an organized manner, individuals and organizations should make efforts to meet such standards and to use them as assessment criteria. Standards should be revised, as appropriate in response to changes in society and people's needs.

JNA has developed code of conduct for nursing service and other guidance materials to be distributed to the member facilities. Each facility should use these resources and establish more specific and practical standards of its own, according to the characteristics of the facility and nursing practice, in order to provide better nursing care.

11. Nurses endeavor to create and develop professional knowledge and skills through research and practice, and to contribute to the progress of nursing science.

In practicing nursing, nurses should always utilize the most recent findings obtained by research and practice, and should make every effort to develop new professional knowledge and skills to provide better nursing care. Developed knowledge and skills should be accumulated and contribute to the future progress of nursing science. That is, nurses carry a responsibility to develop a core of research-based and practice-based professional knowledge and skills, and to contribute to the progress of nursing science.

In addition, nurses should guarantee the rights of the subjects of research in nursing and other scientific fields to not suffer detriment, have full access to information, and be able to make their own decision, and should preserve the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of these people.

12. Nurses strive to protect and promote their own physical and mental health in order to provide quality nursing care.

Nurses, who are engaged in supporting people's health as a profession, provide nursing care based on their own physical and mental health. Thus, nurses should preserve and promote their own personal health, in order to maintain the ability to provide care and to practice quality nursing.

To preserve and promote personal physical and mental health, nurses should maintain a balance between work and their private lives, and between work and rest. Especially to ease physical and mental stress, as well as the burnout syndrome which life-assistance specialists are likely to suffer, stress management of personal and in the workplace should function well.

Working conditions and the workplace environment should be improved so that nurses can practice nursing with appropriate treatment to their responsibility. Coordinated efforts are necessary for safety and risk management to guarantee a healthy working life, including the prevention of radiation exposure, infection, and violence.

13. Nurses maintain high standards of personal conduct which enhance public confidence.

Nursing cannot exist without the confidence of the people who require nursing care. Confidence in nursing depends not only on professional knowledge and skills, but also that the conduct of nurses be derived from sincerity, propriety, noble character, cleanliness, and humility. Since social confidence is also indispensable for nursing, nurses are required to cultivate common senses, as well as deepen accomplishment of other specific areas of expertise. Nurses should be aware of the social mission and responsibility of this profession, take pride as specialists, and maintain standards of personal conduct.

14. Nurses share with society the responsibility for environmental issues, so that people can obtain better health.

Nurses are responsible for maintaining and promoting well-being and the prevention of diseases, which entails advocate of the rights of people to enjoy healthy and cultured lives. Therefore, nurses should participate in the development of a health-promoting environment, while sharing with society the responsibility of and efforts for the resolution of issues related to the destruction of the natural environment and the deterioration of the social environment.

Nurses should fulfill their obligations in preventing the environmental damage caused by health and welfare activities, by treating medical waste properly and monitoring their disposal process. Nurses should also work actively for environmental protection to maintain and promote human health, including the protection of clean air and water, the securement of safe food, and noise control.

Nurses should cooperate with people, and participate in policy proposals and decision-making in the field of health and welfare, with the aim of solving community problems regarding natural and social environments and promoting good health.

Moreover, nurses should work with people to build and maintain a peaceful society, which is fundamental to an environment in which human safety and good health is protected and people can live without fear.

15. Nurses, through the professional organization, participate in establishing a system for quality nursing care and contribute to the development of a better society.

Throughout the ages, nurses have been entrusted with a mission to enhance the qualifications of nursing professionals to sustain and promote quality care. To perform this mission, nurses should keep a high level of interest in systems related to health, welfare, and nursing, and should try to reform these systems to allow them address changes in society and the needs of people.

In addition, in order to improve the quality of the nursing profession and its social, economic, and welfare conditions, nurses should act through the professional organization, and should contribute to the quest for a better society through such actions.