

ETHICAL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR NURSE EDUCATORS

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BY

OLANREWAJU SOWUNMI, R.N., M.Ed.

INTRODUCTION

Educators all over the world are role models for their 'unborn' professionals and mirror for them to look through and see themselves. These attributes place special responsibilities on educators in general and in particular reference to this gathering-nurse educators. Being responsible means being accountable for one's action. Responsibility refers to specific account or liability associated with a performance of duties of a particular role while accountability means being answerable to oneself and others for one's own actions (International Council of Nurses Code of Ethics 2000).

The practice of nursing education should be guided by acceptable code of conduct and nurse educators must have a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge in the nursing profession. The term 'code' literally means 'a systematic collection of statutes, body of laws so arranged to avoid inconsistency and overlapping' while 'ethics' is described as 'relating to 'morals, treating or moral questions, moral correct, honourable...'' (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1976). Ethical code could be inferred from these definitions as systematic moral statutes or guidelines that serve as an ethical (moral) armour which should encourage and control educators to exercise their moral power when carrying their special roles.

There are international acceptable ethical codes that guide professional clinical nurses in their professional activities but such guidelines are not widely available for nurse educators. There seems a dearth of documentation in this regard; however, the documentations of Murray, (Gilloso, Lonnon, Mercer and Robinson (2002) on Ethical principle in university Teaching and Rosenkoetter (1987) on Code of Ethics for Nurse Educator are useful frameworks for exploration.

The nurse educator's roles as a teacher, leader, mentor, counselor, researcher, collaborator, scholar, motivator and clinician are so vast that conflict of interest may occur in the discharge of these roles. The challenges that face nurse educators include ability to produce nurses that will continually uphold qualitative professional nursing in terms of knowledge, attitude and skill. These challenges would be met if nurse educators are not only concerned with training of students but rather, they themselves are informed and adopt ethical guidelines that describe the conduct of the specialty. During the course of this presentation attempt would be made to discuss the ethical principles that should guide nurse educators' actions and also, a typical Code of Conduct for Nurse Educators would be presented.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

The following principles would be discussed under these subheadings:

- Content competency
- Teaching competency
- Student development
- Confidentiality
- Dual relationships with students
- Dealing with sensitive Issues
- Valid evaluations of students
- Respect for colleagues
- Creativity
- Financial integrity
- Commitment to the profession

1 CONTENT COMPETENCY

The principle of content competency requires that nurse educators must be knowledgeable in the area to be taught and must have adequate educational preparation. The educational preparation for nurse educators must blend the historical characteristics and development in professional nursing with those of graduate educator (Kelly 1980; Baatabhe 1997). The blended characteristics and development give direction to core knowledge, professional values and competencies that nurse educators in an academic or practice setting must possess and model to others as they perform their roles.

A competent nurse educator must combine the ideology of professional graduate education and professional nursing education. The ideology of professional graduate education which must blend with the ideology of professional nursing is characterized by:

- Advanced preparation in one or more fields beyond the undergraduate level.
- Mastery of core knowledge
- Independent study to broaden ones perspective
- Active scholarship and research that foster a life time inquiry and
- Critical understanding of health issues and trends (Heiss 1970, Kelly 1980).

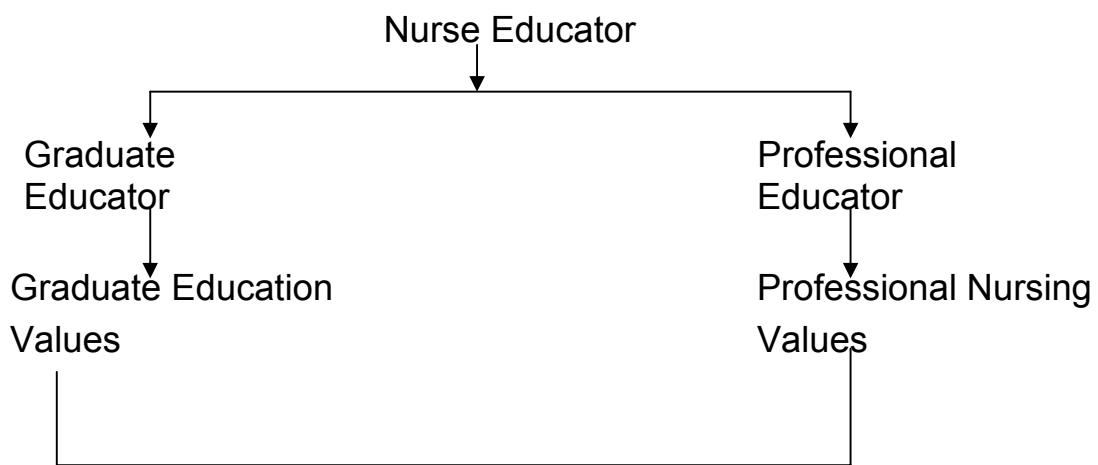
Graduate education ideology fosters critical thinking, effective decision making, scholarly activities that lead to development of body of knowledge in nursing.

Professional nursing ideology on the other hand fosters professional values, which include caring, altruism, autonomy, human dignity, integrity, social justice and life-long commitment to learning (American Association for Collegiate Nursing 1998). These

professional values enable nurse educators to prepare students that will reflect credit to nursing and nursing education and safeguard client from harm. The combination of the two ideologies provide a framework (Fig. 1) for preparing competent nurse educator in selecting core contents in his/her roles as teacher, scholar and collaborator, researcher, motivator etc.

Fig 1:

Nurse Educators' Preparation for Competencies



Adapted from: South Eastern Education Board (2002): Nurse Educator Competencies p.15

The selected content areas must be current, accurate, representative and appropriate to the practice of the nursing profession. Incompetence in the core knowledge on the part of the nurse educator usually reflects in teaching such content with inadequate knowledge. In such cases, generalization cannot be made to explain in-depth meaning of concepts in the class or the teacher can just teach the areas that he or she feels comfortable to teach.

TEACHING COMPETENCY

This competency implies that teachers must have ability to select appropriate instructional material to achieve instructional objectives. Andragogy method of teaching is widely accepted and adopted in nursing school, the method that promotes experiential learning and self-directedness. However, student should not be let alone and without guidance. Studies have revealed that students experience a lot of anxiety

(Nolan & Nolan 1997) when left alone. Students will appreciate self-directedness and searching out of facts but with the direction and guidance of the teacher. Nurse educators are accountable for the students' performance; hence they must be protected from any psychological harm. Additionally, nurse educators should take cognizance of student learning needs and diversities and be informed about different teaching methods for different learning style. An effective teacher must be able to vary teaching styles to suit different learning styles. As part of integrity, a nurse educator must acknowledge teaching in-competencies either in mastery of content or delivery of instruction.

In other to achieve effective instructional competence, the teacher must make concerted efforts to keep abreast with recent innovations in nursing, attend continuing education program like workshops and seminars and cultivate the habit of life-long learning. Deficiencies in instructional competencies is evident by the use of incongruent instructional materials or assessment method for a particular course objective or not giving students adequate opportunity to learn skills that are included in the course content.

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

One main goal of education is to inculcate in the learner cognitive psychomotor and effective components that enables them to function independently in the society. The competent nurse educator teaches adequate course content based on professional educational philosophy and affective content as stipulated in the Ethical Code of Conduct for Nurses. The International Council of Nurses Code of Ethics (2000) has its principal components as:

- Nurses and the people - the professional nurses' main responsibility is to the people requiring nursing care.
- Nurses and practice - nurses have personal responsibility and accountability for nursing practice and for maintaining competence by continual learning.
- Nurses and the profession - nurses assume major role in determining and implementing nursing care.
- Nurse and co worker- nurses sustain a cooperative relationship with co-workers in nursing and other fields.

Detailed description of these element keep nurses informed of their expectations in carrying out professional nursing care. They safeguard the students from incompetent, illegal, unethical practices and also from unethical immoral appearance. The nurse educator directs and teaches the student to uphold the ethics while being a model and mentor. Apart from ethical teachings, instructional strategies that promote critical

thinking, Independent study, autonomy, free pursuit of learning are adopted by the teacher to foster student development.

Another salient, point under the principle of student development is that nurse educators should demonstrate respect for student as individuals and adhere to their roles as intellectual guides and counselors. There is the need for honest academic conduct especially when conducting researches. Students should not be forced to participate in researches; neither should they be utilized for data gathering in a way that serves the ends of the teacher to the disadvantages of the student. When students participate in studies, they should be acknowledged as co—author or contributor as the case may be. Authorship should be accorded when a student solely conceptualize, fund and conduct research. In so doing, the nurse educator is utilizing the principle of equity, justice, freedom from psychological harm and integrity.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Nurse educators are confidants in terms of students' grades private communications and instructional decisions. Communication and grades are treated with confidentiality expect with the consent of the student. Students are entitled to the same level of confidentiality with their teachers as a lawyer with his client. Violation of confidentiality leads to mistrust, low morale and poor motivation to study. In the absence or student consent, any of these could be construed as a - violation of confidentiality; providing student academic records to a potential employer, researcher or private investigator, discussing a student grade or academic problems with another faculty member and using privately communication of student experiences as teaching or research materials (Murray, Gillese, Lennon, Mereer and Robinson 2002).

DUAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

The principle of humanism is greatly adopted in any human organization but humanistic principle must not pave way for professional misconduct. Conflict of interest will occur when an educator enters into dual relationship with students which may lead to favourism on the part of the teacher.

This principle demands that educators should keep relationships with students focused of instructional goals and academic requirements. An example of dual relationship that can interrupt student academic focus is any form of sexual relationship or close relationship with a current student. Other possible sources of dual relationship is direct supervision or teaching of a spouse, intimate family member, close friend, business partner; accepting and giving gifts to students, in-depth socialization with students, lending to and borrowing money from students.

When these situations exist, the educator's ability to maintain objectivity would be difficult and other students will not be convinced that there is no favoritism. It is very true that rapport and good interpersonal relationship should exist between the teacher and the students but such extensive relationships as outlined above are disastrous for achievement of educational goals. Often times they lead to confusion, radical behaviour from fellow students, lack of respect, dignity and worth on the part of the teacher, compromise of standard, harm to student development and disregard for the nursing profession.

DEALING WITH SENSITIVE ISSUES

Often times, the teacher needs to teach topics that may affect some learners psychologically, for example, dangers associated with scarification, female genital mutilation, child abandonment, care of vulnerable groups like orphans. Some members of the group may have the problem and may be disturbed psychologically during the classroom discussion. The adverse effect on the student is to feel excluded in the discussion rather than inclusive. The skilled nurse educator would endeavour to generalize examples as much as possible and also pre-form the class about the content of such discussion. When films or recorded methods are used the teacher may need to inform the group about the content of the film.

VALID EVALUATION OF STUDENTS

Evaluation of performance plays an important role in students' lives and their careers, therefore nurse educators should make every reasonable effort to ensure that their evaluation of student reflects each student's true merit. Evaluation procedures that are consistent with course objectives are used. Additionally, students' evaluation must follow established guidelines so as to prepare them to cope with the challenges that could be posed by evaluation procedures. It is also of importance that test items are valid, reliable, practical and objective with acceptable level of difficulty and discrimination. Opportunities should be available to establish inter-rater values when student fails or has marginal score.

RESPECT FOR COLLEAGUES

As much as educators want their students to cooperate with their co-workers (ICN code of Ethics 2000) so also they themselves must strive to work in harmony with one another. There is increased productivity gains when professionals cooperate in workplaces towards achievement of a common goal. Educators should demonstrate respect for each other, not discriminating against or harassing each other, respect each other's opinion, appreciate strengths and weaknesses and respect professional judgment. The overriding interest among educators is that of student development and achievement of learning outcomes. It is not uncommon for disagreement to occur but such should be settled privately in a professional, matured manner. Educators should not allow argument or exchange of words or passing derogatory comments about one another publicly.

CREATIVITY

Creativity is innate ability, which educators should possess in order to bring up original ideas. An inspiring educator fascinates because he /she overflows with fresh and new ideas. The principle requires that the teacher triggers imagination of students so that they too become spurred with enthusiasm. Initiative and integrity are closely related to creativity. Students need to be creative and skilled teachers will recognize when they need direction and guide them without hesitation.

FINANCIAL INTEGRITY

This principle deals with how funds are generated, disbursed and accounted for. Many institutions have guidelines which must be adhered to. In situations when funds are generated internally, they should be used for academic and official purposes alone. Student should not be used as sales representatives and violation of financial integrity occurs when an educator collaborates with administrative support staff to manoeuvre financial documents.

COMMITMENT TO THE INSTITUTION

As members of the training institution, nurse educators seek above all to be effective teacher with commitment to achieving the institutional mission, goals and objectives. At all times, it is important that nurse educators display loyalty to their institutions, through a collective responsibility to work for the good of their organizations. An esteemed loyalty is displayed when educators do not engage in work activity or social behaviours that conflict with official responsibilities. The present socio-economic situation of the country and desire for service in more fulfilling working environments force may nurse educators to interrupt or terminate their services. However, in the event of taking such decisions, nurse educators should recognize the effect of their decisions upon their institutions and give due notice of their intentions.

COMMITMENT TO THE PROFESSION

Every profession grows through its education sector, therefore nurse educators are not only committed to the teaching-learning situation but to continue to work together with clinicians for the upliftment of the philosophy of the nursing profession. This is achieved through active participation in professional bodies and specialist groups for welfare and advancement of knowledge. Politically inclined nurse educators are needed in the professional bodies to present position papers on the needs of the profession and to engage in democratic discussion for the common good of the entire professional nurses.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR NURSE EDUCATORS

Utilizing the principles that have been discussed, nurse educators assume responsibility for maintaining standards of quality nursing education without discrimination with regards to race, colour, religion, social-economic status, age, sex or political affiliation.

The Code of Ethics by Rosenkoetter (1987) is considered as basic for this proposed code but with modification to suit our educational context. Nurse educators will:

- Assume responsibility and accountability for their actions in the practice of nursing and in the education of students.
- Function as advocates for students, client and school.
- Strive to promote critical thinking, effective decision making, caring, respect and excellence in nursing.
- Facilitate and guide the learning of students in such a way as to reflect credit on nursing and nursing education.
- Equitably apply standard of performance to students and to themselves.
- Accept responsibility for contributing to the evolving body of knowledge
- Demonstrate respect for confidential matters relating to students, clients, professional colleagues and institution.
- Accept the responsibility of maintaining their own competencies in nursing in education and in practice and also to work within their competencies.
- Endeavour to safeguard the client and the student from incompetent, illegal or unethical practices by students, school and other health care providers.
- Participate in professional organizations, attesting to their commitment, to the standards of nursing and to nursing education.
- Be accountable for students' performance, to professional colleagues, to the profession, to the institution and to the society.
- Demonstrate respect for the rights of students regarding their participation in nursing research.
- Demonstrate respect for the student as a person and as an individual contributor to the profession and society.
- Demonstrate creativity in the education of nurses, in the practice of nursing and foster the skill in students.
- Endeavour to evaluate students' performance without favourism.
- Demonstrate honesty, integrity and accountability in generating and disbursing official funds.
- Demonstrate integrity and discipline in relationship with students.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Attempts have been made to present ethical guidelines that should guide us as nurse educators in the discharge of our responsibilities. The intent of the guidelines is to supply clarification which will facilitate the delivery of quality nursing education. It is not the intent of this paper to provide rules or laws with penalties, or that the code will automatically apply in all situations, or attempt to reduce academic and professional freedom, - but rather to ensure that academic freedom is exercised in a responsible manner. Additionally, a 17-point Code of conduct was presented which is expected to guide and control our conduct in the teaching.

In conclusion, nursing education is a special segment within the larger group of professional nursing. Nurse educators are important specialty group because their abilities or lack of abilities will affect the achievement of the school and that of the students. The most basic ethical principle is that of the responsibility of the professional nurse educator to perform only those service/activities for which the person has acquired recognized level of competencies.

The competencies connotes that a nurse educator is a skilled health care provider who meets professional nursing standard and has graduate nursing education as an advanced generalist or specialist. Even though, ethical behaviour involves adequate educational preparation, interaction between the professional, the person served and the employer, responsibility for ethical conduct in the teaching-learning situation rests with the professional nurse educator. Nurse educators must assume full responsibility and accountability for their action competencies in the practice of nursing and education of students.

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