The Issue of Stress of Conscience and Moral Injury in the Ethical Climate of Nursing: An Investigative Study

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Abstract

Personal conflict can occur for the nurse when healthcare decisions cause internal moral or religious conflicts resulting in a stress of conscience. The healthcare organization’s ethical climate also plays a vital role in the nurse’s chosen work environment and its work climate as a determining factor for behavior. In the realm of daily patient-care activities, the nursing unit’s climate can serve as the foundation for support mechanisms, which nurses may utilize when coping with difficult situations moderate the effects of moral stress and injury. How nurses view their work, environments may determine if nurses raise ethical concerns among other nursing staff members and/or if the concerns are resolved. The ability to address many of the dilemmas experienced by nurses can be affected by the ethical climate of specific practice areas. The implication regarding the role of conscience and moral injury among health care providers, including nurses, remains an unsettled area in bioethics. Ethical dilemmas may lead to moral distress in nurses. This presentation discusses a recent quantitative study of registered nurses in one southern state that investigated registered nurses’ attitudes regarding the role between conscience and ethical climate in acute care environments. Consideration will be given to moral injury and strategies to promote resilience in the workplace that may enhance staff retention efforts in hospitals.