

The Ethical Dilemma of Burnout

One of the more recent ethical issues in the nursing profession is the decline in the emotional well-being of healthcare workers. The pandemic in 2020 exacerbated preexisting concerns of nursing burnout which led to the current nursing shortage. “Data from 2022 revealed alarming rates of burnout among healthcare workers, with a significant portion experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression, underscoring the magnitude of the issue.” (Performance Health Partners, 2024). Ethically, there is no reason for nurses to unreasonably sacrifice their own mental or physical health in providing care for patients. It is important for nurses to be aware of burnout to prevent unintentional nonmaleficence.

Nursing staff should care for themselves and be able to identify symptoms of burnout. This is because the “health and safety of nurses and patients are intertwined.” (American Nurses Association, n.d.). A nurse who has addressed their physiological and psychological needs is ready to care for others in a safe and appropriate manner. Nurses must be aware of the signs and symptoms of burnout including sleep disturbances, increased susceptibility to illnesses, difficulty concentrating, irritability, and loss of interest in activities so they can correctly identify when they need help.

Leaders can play an important role in mitigating the risk of burnout by destigmatizing behavioral health needs and establishing personal connections. They can also “enhance recruitment and retention strategies to

further alleviate burnout and bolster patient safety.” (Performance Health Partners, 2024). Facilities that are properly staffed are more likely to see a decrease in burnout because of a reduced workload for nursing staff. Facilities that have become short staffed require more work from their nursing staff which can contribute to burnout.

Being able to identify burnout and offering ways to mitigate the risk is essential to preventing unintentional nonmaleficence. Nurses should recognize that they should not unreasonably sacrifice their own mental or physical health so that patient safety can be maintained.

References

American Nurses Association. (n.d.). *Provision 5*. American Nurses Association. <https://codeofethics.ana.org/provision-5-1>

Performance Health Partners. (2024, December 30). *Top 10 Patient Safety Concerns 2024*. Performance Health Partners. <https://www.performancehealthus.com/blog/top-10-patient-safety-concerns-2024>