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Online Assignment: Friday, February 28th, 2025

Current Ethical Issue

One particular current ethical issue has to do with nursing staffing shortages. As aging populations have continued to grow, so has the nursing shortage. The nursing shortage that we know today really started when the baby boomers started to retire and leave the profession and is only increasing the deficit of nurses. The nurse staffing shortages also pose a safety risk for not only the patient, but the nurse as well. Nurses will ethically follow the principle of non-maleficence, which is the duty to do no harm. However, with a large census of patients, depending on where you are, may have upwards of five patients to one nurse. In provision 2.4 of the *ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses*, it states “the nurse patient relationship may be negatively impacted by a lack of safety or safety measures in a given environment or situation.” The higher the patient load a nurse has, the higher the chance the nurse can potentially make an error. While we know this is a safety risk, we also know that this reduces the quality of the patient care a nurse is able provide.

Nursing staffing shortages have only increased since the COVID-19 pandemic due to health care workers of all different kinds (not just nursing) experiencing chronic burnout and mental health problems or exacerbations, to name a few. During the pandemic, the nurses, self-care and mental health was put on the metaphorical back burner, in order to care for the large population of people ill with COVID-19, leading to the chronic burnout of the nurses. This also led to “high levels of turnover with the potential for further declines.” The nursing workforce needs more support to help get better staffing policies and even reform the workplace so that the nurses can provide high-quality care that’s safe and not compromising their own health in the process.

Resource:

Martin, B., Kaminski-Ozturk, N., O'Hara, C., & Smiley, R. (2023). Examining the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Burnout and Stress Among U.S. Nurses. *Journal of nursing regulation*, 14(1), 4-12.
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