Public Health Nursing
Ethics in Undergraduate Nursing Curricula

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Public Health Nurses

- face unique ethical issues compared to other RNs
- limited published research exploring ethical issues faced by PHNs
- ethical issues in PHN involve relationships with clients, colleagues, and organization (Duncan, 1992; Falk-Rafael & Betker, 2012; Oberle & Tenove, 2000)
- ethical issues in PHN are highly relational in nature (Marcellus, 2005) and rooted in context, interwoven, and complex (Oberle & Tenove, 2000)
Ethics and Public Health

- Application of biomedical principles can be limiting (Upshur, 2002)
- Ethical framework need to focus on public interest and common good (Baylis, Sherwin, & Kenny, 2008)
- Must also address issues concerning social justice (Kass, 2001)

**Ethical Frameworks in Public Health**

- Principles for the Justification of Public Health Intervention
  - Upshur, 2002
- An Ethical Framework for Public Health
  - Kass, 2001
- A Relational Account of Public Health Ethics
  - Baylis, Sherwin, & Kenny, 2008
PHN ethics and nursing curricula (survey)

Response rate: 46.5% (40/86 schools of nursing accredited through CASN)

- 92.5% (37) offered a community health nursing course (43% offered in third year of nursing program)
- 55% (22) discussed PHN and Home Health Nursing as distinct specialties of community health nursing

How is public health nursing ethics addressed within the course/curriculum?

- PHN ethics integrated in class discussions (48.7%) but amount of time spent and ways of discussion varied between programs
- Introduced ethical theories such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, feminist ethics
- Other concepts used: primary health care principles, social justice, advocacy, equity
Public health nursing ethics content in nursing curricula still evolving
- Concept of social justice frequently mentioned by respondents when teaching community health nursing/public health nursing
- No consensus on ethical frameworks used to teach public health nursing ethics

**Survey Findings**

**Recommendations**

**Nursing Education:**
- Add/strengthen discussion of public health and public health ethics in nursing curricula
- Continue discussion of social justice in nursing curricula
- Use Relational ethics to examine ethical issues in public health nursing

**Nursing Practice:**
- Provide continuing education to support PHNs’ ethical decision making
- Create space for PHNs to address ethical issues faced in practice e.g. forming local public health nursing ethics committee

**Nursing Research:**
- Explore PHNs understanding and experience of ethical issues in the workplace through nursing research

**PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING ETHICS IN UNDERGRADUATE NURSING CURRICULA**