

HISTORY OF NURSING AS AN ETHICAL SCIENCE

Burkhardt - Chapter 1 - *Ethics and Issues in Contemporary Nursing*

Moral thought: individual's examination of right and wrong, good and bad

- Some define moral thinking and ethical action in terms related to empathy
 - Visualizing the circumstances of another individual
 - Imaging self in same condition
- Some define as a natural outcome of social consciousness and motivation
 - "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
 - "Golden rule" though to be universal and fundamental to most major traditions
- Ethics based on religious belief - motivation based on obeying commandment
 - Fulfilling perceived duty to God
 - Serving others as means to obtain spiritual reward

RELATED QUESTIONS

Do unaffected members of society have obligation to alleviate suffering of other members?
Does society have obligation to intervene via members altering their lives toward end of helping?

Ethics

Rules of action that are specifically related to solving moral problems

- Utilize individual abilities to best advantage
- Fairly distribute burden of providing services and resources

Nursing emerges as profession as a product for moral thinking

- Exists to meet certain needs of individuals and groups in society
 - "Service-oriented" profession
 - ANA (1980) landmark document: Nursing a Social Policy Statement
 - Profession's first description of its social responsibility
 - Subsequent revision (1996) Nursing's Social Policy Statement
 - Created by society for purpose of meeting specific perceived health needs
 - Profession has made implicit promise to ensure members are competent to serve
 - Provides that its members are the only persons who qualify to provide service
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- Relationship of social need and individual motivation to provide care are complementary
 - Individuals exist who for whatever reason are interested in serving others
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- Historical perspective for nursing
 - Historically nurses were not always available as a profession
 - Role of caring for the sick was in other times relegated to others
 - Slaves, servants, inmates, prostitutes
 - Social institutions devised means of caring for weak or infirm
 - Nursing roots comes from unsavory origins "Sary Gamp" of Charles Dickens novel
 - "Witches, midwives and nurses"

RELATED QUESTIONS

What motivates people to help others in need?
What are motivation to help for those engaged in health care profession?
Self interest? Altruism? Combination?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

Ancient Times

- Cosmology of a culture indirectly determines specific beliefs re disease and healing (Acherberg 1990)
- Cosmology: philosophy which describes structure, origin, processes of universe
 - Beliefs about gods of culture
 - Nature of Gods worship affects prevailing healing beliefs
- Ancient cultures healing involve sacred elements of the earth and spirit of healing practices
- Healer viewed in ancient times in terms associated with the sacred
- Practitioners thought to have special spiritual gifts
- Sacred ceremonies performed by priests, priestesses or shamans
- Healers thought to embody gods on earth
- Ancient Hebrews codified health practices as integral with religion
 - Laws concerning food, detection/reporting disease, disposing excreta, feminine hygiene, isolation, hand-washing, care of food
 - Priest-physician: people mandated to honor person and obey doctrine
- Most early cultures associate healing with the sacred

Early Christian Era

- Advent of Christianity exerted the most profound religious influence on healing thought and practice in Western civilization
- Differences of opinions concerning positive vs negative influences of Christianity on nursing
 - Positive perspective
 - Christian doctrine supports caring for others particularly the less fortunate
 - Early Christian nurses often women of high social status - rooms in their homes served as hospitals or "Christrooms"
 - Negative view
 - As centuries passed Christian views toward woman and healing became decidedly negative
 - Women enjoyed resurgence of power and respectability for only a few centuries after birth of Christ

Middle Ages

- Status of women plummeted
- Religious leaders set stage for persecution of women which would last for 100s of years
- Legacy of misogyny

St Jerome: "woman is the gate of the devil, the path of wickedness, the sting of the serpent, in a word a perilous object"

St Thomas Aquinas: "only make use of a necessary object, woman, who is needed to preserve the species or provide food and drink ... Woman was created to be man's (helper) but her unique role is in conception since for all other purposes men would be better assisted by other men"

- Church was only organized institution that provided outlet for practice of nursing
 - Church-sanctioned secular orders were the only legitimate avenue for women
 - Church popularized ideals of virginity, poverty and life of service
 - By end of 13th century 200,000 served as nurses within these orders

- Health care practices of the middle ages promoted the spread of disease
 - “Mortify the flesh” in the name of religion
 - Little attention to physical needs
 - Poor hygiene; people were dirty, covered with rashes; clothing was woolen and irritating
 - Ticks and fleas presented a public health problem

- Crusades (1096 AD) - lasted 200 yrs “holy wars”
 - Deplorable sanitary conditions, fatigue, poor nutrition, diarrhea, communicable disease
 - Military nursing orders were formed drawing large numbers of men in field
 - Collection of relics by Catholic Church: body parts, exudations of martyrs
 - Relics believed to hold the key to health - imbued with healing powers

- Catholic church held tremendous influence over the people and gov'ts of Europe
 - Church leaders determined appropriateness of healing arts
 - Church credentialed physicians, nurses, midwives and monitored practice

- Care in hospitals varied from benevolent to cruel and inhumane
- Mentally ill were particularly vulnerable
 - Perceived to be possessed by devils and punishment for sin
 - Chained, manacled and starved under filthy conditions
 - Tortured in thought to driving out the devil

Renaissance and Reformation

- 16th century - spirit and quest for knowledge
- Intellectual rebirth that began the scientific era
- Reformation was religious movement precipitated by widespread abuses by Church
- Scientific community began gradual escape from control of Church
 - Advances in science and mathematics
 - Rene Descartes proposed separation of mind and body
- **Cartesian philosophy** (based on Descartes) replaces religious views
 - Replaced religious views concerning physical and spiritual realms
 - Separation between caring and curing in healing arts
 - Result, while beneficial to science **did NOT elevate status of nursing**
 - Spirit no longer seen to abide in matter; reverence for physical departs
 - Medicine no longer viewed as working in sacred spaces
 - Nurses assumed the “caring” role - caring given lower priority vs curing

- Reformation split the church
 - Based on widespread abuses of church
 - Struggle between Catholic and Protestant groups spread through Europe
 - Catholicism lost power in many countries
 - Laws and customs in Protestant countries discouraged humane care of unfortunate
 - Discouraged care of “downtrodden and weak”
 - Religious orders driven out of hospital - many hospitals closed

- Hospitals became places of horror
 - No qualified groups to replace expelled nursing orders
 - Unqualified and undesirable women assigned nursing duties
- "Dark Period of Nursing" 1550-1850
 - Convalescent patients, prostitutes, prisoners provided hospital nursing care

Modern Times

- Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) seen as founder of modern nursing
 - Devoutly religious but worked to free nursing from bonds of the Church
 - Began career as result of a mystic experience
 - States that God called her four times calling her into service
 - Service in Crimean war said to be result of second revelation
 - Describes nursing as "caring for mind and body" - rejects Descartes views
- Current trends
 - Recent resurgence of interest in spirituality and relationship to health and healing
 - Growing movement of religious zeal
 - Nurses must be sensitive to relationship between health and spirituality

INFLUENCE OF THE HISTORY OF WOMEN

- Nursing is generally a profession of women
- Status of women in society is reflected in freedom and respect accorded to nurses
- Nursing molded by social forces that affect gender roles in society
- Women are classically stereotyped as caring and suited to nursing

Ancient Times

- Reigning deity had feminine, bisexual or androgynous nature
- Women were not leaders in healing arts
- Eventually gods assumed a masculine nature and women's role as primary healers dissolved

Early Christian Era

- Religious belief moved toward single male god; women role evolved to subservient caregiver
- Women's role in healing was minimal during era of Jesus
- Jesus challenged tradition - associated freely with women
- Women enjoyed a resurgence of power, respectability for a few centuries only

Middle Ages

- Status of women has grossly and sharply deteriorated
- Church and newly formed medical profession actively sought to eliminate lay female healers
- Women excluded from universities
- Forbidden by Church to perform healing arts except for devoting life to nursing orders
- Church imposed strict controls on new profession of medicine
 - Allowed to develop only within terms set by Catholic doctrine
 - Officially prohibited practice by women

- Women prohibited from practicing - some practiced covertly
 - Even applying soothing salve to one's own child was evidence of witchcraft
 - Midwifery permitted but risk of accusation of witchcraft if problems with mother or child
- Persons practicing without sanction of church believed to be in collusion with the devil
- **Women viewed as intrinsically evil**
 - Pain of childbirth punishment for Eve's transgression
 - Providing pain relief during childbirth were severely punished
- Original sin of Eve used to justify torturing and murder thousands of women during witch hunts
- Physician treatments even when university trained were often ineffective and dangerous
 - Frequently based on superstition
 - Blood letting, astrology, alchemy, incantations
- Poor lacked access to physicians; peasant woman often only healers for the masses
- Women healers though unsanctioned were often effective
 - Extensive knowledge re cures handed down from oral tradition
 - Used empirical methods of observation, trial and evaluation
 - Developed extensive understanding of bones, muscles, herbs, drugs, midwifery
- Authorities viewed women healers were practicing witchcraft or magic ; honoring pagan gods
- Healers were thought to be in contortion with the devil - **hunted in witch hunts**
- War, pestilence, poverty, religious fervor, superstition, political unrest
- Witch hunts through partnership Church, state and emerging medical profession
 - Women healers represented political, religious and sexual threat to church and state
 - **Heinous crimes and torture perpetrated against women**
 - Rounded up en-masse in some areas and executed
 - Torture, disfigurement, humiliation and death
 - Some European towns left with no women at all
 - Often breasts publically amputated prior to execution
 - Number of victims is unknown; estimates 200,000 to 10 million
- Scars from witch-hunts prevailed
 - Women never again gained full citizenship in any country
 - Role in healing profession never reinstated
 - Women prohibited from independent practice by law in every country in Europe
 - Males became authoritative medical professionals

Renaissance and Reformation

- Witch hunts lasted well into the Reformation
- Though witch hunts ended, women continued to live in subordination to men
- Not allowed to be legitimate members of any profession
- Nursing entered "**Dark Period**" - hospital nursing practiced by unqualified woman

Modern Period

- Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) became model for nurses
- Lavinia Dock (1858-1956) feminist - social protest, picketing, parading for women's rights
 - Concerned with social problems plaguing nursing
 - Concerns were unheeded by her contemporaries
 - Nurses fought many of the same battles in 20th century
- 1970s saw many nurses speak to sex discrimination along with women's movement

- **Nurse practitioners, nurse midwives** initiated advanced practice nursing (1970s)
- Succeeding decades (1980s 1990s) have witnessed increasing areas for nurses
 - Increasing political, social and professional responsibilities
 - Expanded roles

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - adapted from Burkhardt et al. p. 18

1. What is relationship between role of women and status of nursing? How does this relationship compare to an historical perspective of the role of woman and nursing.
2. What are the current ramifications between historical separation of professions of medicine and nursing (curing vs caring)?
3. What is the relationship between the role of nurses in the health care system today and their role in ethical decision making in the clinical setting?
4. What are challenges that the nursing profession faces as related to the attaining or maintaining an authoritative role in the health care system of the future.