

Ethical challenges in geriatric nursing: Navigating autonomy, consent, and care decisions.

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Introduction

Geriatric nursing involves unique ethical challenges due to the complexities of caring for older adults with diverse medical, psychological, and social needs. As the aging population continues to grow, nurses are increasingly faced with situations that require balancing respect for patient autonomy, obtaining informed consent, and making critical care decisions. This article explores the ethical dilemmas inherent in geriatric nursing and offers strategies for navigating these challenges effectively [1].

Respect for autonomy is a foundational principle in healthcare. However, in geriatric nursing, ensuring that older adults can make autonomous decisions is often complicated by factors such as Conditions like dementia or Alzheimer's disease can affect decision-making capacity [2].

Family members may attempt to influence or override the patient's choices. Older adults may defer decisions to healthcare providers or family due to cultural norms or trust in authority figures. Nurses should assess the patient's ability to understand, evaluate, and communicate decisions. In cases of impaired capacity, surrogate decision-makers or advance directives may guide care [3].

Informed consent ensures that patients understand and agree to proposed treatments or interventions. In geriatric nursing, obtaining informed consent can be challenging due to Older adults often face multiple chronic illnesses, making it difficult to explain treatment options clearly [4].

Hearing loss, vision problems, or memory deficits may hinder effective communication. Nurses may feel pressured to obtain consent quickly in fast-paced care settings. Use visual aids, written materials, or translators to enhance understanding. Family members or legal representatives can assist in ensuring that the patient comprehends the information [5].

Geriatric nurses often encounter ethical dilemmas when making care decisions, especially in situations involving Determining the balance between prolonging life and ensuring comfort can be emotionally and ethically challenging. Limited healthcare resources may necessitate prioritizing care for some patients over others [6].

Deciding whether an intervention's potential benefits outweigh its risks can be subjective and context-dependent. Applying

frameworks such as principlism (autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice) can guide decision-making. Consulting with physicians, social workers, and ethicists can provide diverse perspectives and support. Focusing on the patient's values, goals, and preferences ensures that decisions align with their wishes [7].

Ethical challenges in geriatric nursing can be mitigated through Training programs on ethics, communication, and dementia care equip nurses with the skills needed to navigate complex situations. Institutional guidelines on informed consent, advance care planning, and end-of-life care provide a framework for ethical practice [8].

Access to ethics committees, counseling, and peer support helps nurses manage the emotional toll of ethical dilemmas. Providing extra time for discussions and questions can improve the quality of the consent process [9].

Providing clear, simple explanations and offering choices can help patients feel more in control of their care. Nurses should advocate for the patient's preferences and rights, even when they conflict with family or institutional priorities [10].

Conclusion

Ethical challenges in geriatric nursing are multifaceted and require a thoughtful, patient-centered approach. By prioritizing autonomy, ensuring informed consent, and making collaborative care decisions, nurses can navigate these challenges effectively. Continued education, strong institutional support, and a commitment to ethical principles are essential for providing compassionate, high-quality care to older adults.

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