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EDITORIAL

Strengthening moral courage in nurses

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In providing quality and safe care, nurses need to be able to confront ethical problems and at the same time to be morally competent to make ethical decisions (Amiri et al., 2019), which are much more challenging nowadays than ever before (Salmela et al., 2017).

Increasing awareness of care recipients, changes in society's health needs, and social justice and access to health services have increased ethical stress and the need for higher levels of moral courage in nurses (Taraz et al., 2019). The need to resist unethical behaviour (Lachance, 2017) has also increased.

Moral courage represents having the courage or inner strength to act in accordance with ethical values despite whatever difficulties and risks these acts may produce. An individual with moral courage consciously and voluntarily makes decisions and acts in favor of others despite possible negative consequences for him / herself (Numminen et al., 2017; Pajakoski et al., 2021; Suhonen et al., 2011). Moral courage involves careful consideration of a situation and the making of decisions according to what one holds to be morally right (Koskinen et al., 2021).

Moral courage is a moral competence of nursing, and interest is growing in its strengthening (Numminen et al., 2021). It is described as a personal virtue that can become part of an individual's moral behaviour and moral reasoning, but it needs to be learned (Papouli, 2019). Moral courage is one of the basic components of nursing care and plays a major role in providing the best care. Nurses need moral courage to advocate for their patients to ensure quality and safe care (Numminen et al., 2019), to communicate with other healthcare professionals, and to promote consistent care (Pajakoski et al., 2021).

The application of moral courage has an impact on the personal and professional development of nurses and can strengthen their role (Numminen et al., 2017). Nurses are among the most important members of healthcare teams, whose beliefs and attitudes have a significant impact on the quality of care (Poorchangizi et al., 2017). Strengthening the role of nurses serves to increase the efficiency of the organization. However, for the empowerment of nurses, it is important for organizations to intensify education in ethics (Hu et al., 2022).

One reason is that increasing moral sensitivity and moral courage improves the quality and safety of the care provided (Mohammadi et al., 2022).

Moral courage in nurses is influenced by associated individual and organizational aspects, known as background factors. These can either promote or inhibit nursing behaviours based on moral courage (Pajakoski et al., 2021). Positive experiences, moral sensitivity, and responsibility are among these factors (Numminen et al., 2017). Another factor supporting the moral courage of nurses is teamwork. Teamwork is a firm control regulator of the care provided by all healthcare professionals (Pajakoski et al., 2021).

In terms of organizational factors, it is necessary to create appropriate characteristics in the environment in which nursing care is provided (Pajakoski et al., 2021). Organizations should have a common value system and should discuss ethical aspects (Nunthawong et al., 2020). The formal culture of the organization, its leadership, structure, policy, reward system, socialization mechanism, and decision-making processes also have an important effect. If organizations act ethically, morally, and correctly, the moral stress of nurses with regard to the organization is reduced. Especially now, when we are struggling with the issue of nurse turnover, this aspect is of great importance (Gallagher, 2011).

Numminen et al. (2017) have explored the concept of moral courage in nursing. Despite the ambiguity and vagueness of its definition, they state that moral courage remains closely linked to nursing values, with seven core attributes: true presence; moral integrity; responsibility; honesty; advocacy; commitment and perseverance; and personal risk. The concept of moral courage needs a more complex definition, a better connection with theory, and

requires deeper research on morally courageous behaviour, in particular, the examination of the impact of education and management on strengthening moral courage in nurses (Numminen et al., 2017).

The importance of moral courage in nursing education and nursing practice cannot be underestimated (Gallagher, 2011) and it is a duty to develop it. "Without it, our brightest virtues rust from lack of use. With it, we build, piece by piece, a more ethical world." (Kidder & Bracy, 2001, p. 2).

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