
The Nursing Council of Hong Kong Code of Professional Conduct and Code of Ethics for Nurses in Hong Kong

Introduction

The nursing profession is responsible and accountable to society. To enhance public trust and confidence in the profession, making explicit the standards and values underlying nursing practice is necessary. A Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Hong Kong was formulated in 1986 by the then Nursing Board of Hong Kong. To keep pace with contemporary health care development commensurate with societal and cultural changes, the Nursing Council of Hong Kong which replaced the Nursing Board of Hong Kong in 1999 has now revised the code and also devised a Code of Ethics for an accurate representation of Nurses' ethical responsibilities. The Code of Ethics is adapted largely from the "Code of Ethics for Nurses in the New Millennium" published in a Chinese nursing magazine 《中華護理雜誌》 with due regard to practices in the international community.

Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Hong Kong

Each nurse (registered or enrolled) is accountable for his/her practice. In the exercise of his/her professional responsibilities, each nurse has an obligation to uphold and adhere to the Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Hong Kong. The code aims to make explicit the standards for professional conduct that nurses shall act at all times in their course of duty. It may also serve to provide the public with a basis for decisions regarding standards of professional conduct.

The Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Hong Kong highlights eight aspects of professional conduct that nurses are to comply with in discharging their professional duties. The explanatory statements provide guidelines regarding the way each aspect of professional conduct is to be enacted in practice situations.

Eight aspects of professional conduct

In discharging his/her duty in a professional capacity, each nurse shall act, at all times, in such a manner as to:

1. Respect the dignity, uniqueness, values, culture and beliefs of patients/clients and their families in the provision of nursing care.
2. Hold in confidence personal information obtained in a professional capacity.
3. Safeguard informed decision-making and the wellbeing of patients/clients in the provision of care.
4. Provide safe and competent nursing care.
5. Maintain the agreed standard of practice.
6. Foster the trust that is inherent in the privileged relationship between nurses and their patients/clients.
7. Uphold the image of nurses and the profession by refusing advantages.
8. Practise in accordance with laws of Hong Kong relevant to the area of nursing practice.

Explanatory statements

1. Respect the dignity, uniqueness, values, culture and beliefs of patients/clients and their families in the provision of nursing care
 - 1.1 The nurse recognizes and respects the uniqueness and dignity of each patient/client and responds to his/her need for care.
 - 1.2 The nurse seeks assistance and advice from appropriate personnel in care situations where he/she finds difficulties in providing due care for the patients/clients due to conflict of personal belief.
 - 1.3 The nurse treats with consideration and respect the wishes and decisions of patients/clients and their families when planning and delivering care.

2. **Hold in confidence personal information obtained in a professional capacity.**

2.1 The nurse ensures that the information given by the patients/clients in confidence will only be used for the purposes for which it was given.

2.2 The nurse protects the information obtained in the course of professional practice and discloses only with the patient's/client's consent, or in exceptional circumstances, such as where a court order is made for disclosure.

2.3 When personal information is required for teaching, research or quality assurance procedures, the nurse takes care to protect the patient's/client's anonymity and privacy.

3. **Safeguard informed decision-making and the wellbeing of patients/clients in the provision of care**

3.1 The nurse provides patients/clients and their families with accurate and relevant information to the best of the nurse's knowledge to facilitate them to make informed judgements and decisions.

3.2 In situations where patients are mentally incapacitated or unable to decide or speak for themselves regarding choices of care/treatment, the nurse should endeavor to ensure that the perspective of the patient/client is represented by an appropriate representative.

4. **Provide safe and competent nursing care.**

- 4.1 The nurse promotes a safe and therapeutic environment in the provision of nursing care.
- 4.2 The nurse is responsible and accountable for individual nursing judgements and actions.
- 4.3 The nurse ensures that there is no action or omission of responsibility that is detrimental to the interests and safety of patients/clients.
- 4.4 The nurse uses judgement in relation to individual knowledge, qualifications and competence when accepting or delegating duties or responsibilities.
- 4.5 The nurse collaborates with nursing colleagues and other members of healthcare team to advocate health care environments conducive to safe and competent care.
- 4.6 The nurse practises and maintains the best possible standard of care within the reality of her/his working conditions.
- 4.7 The nurse does not condone or connive at any action that may jeopardize the safety of patients/clients.
- 4.8 The nurse raises objection to practices that compromise safe and appropriate care to patients/clients.
- 4.9 The nurse reports to an appropriate person or authority any circumstances in which safe and appropriate care cannot be provided.
- 4.10 The nurse plays his/her rightful role in the healthcare establishments.

5. **Maintain the agreed standard of practice**

5.1 The nurse is responsible for ensuring that the standard of nursing practice is congruent with the agreed standards of the profession.

5.2 The nurse participates in identifying, implementing and evaluating evidence-based practices.

5.3 The nurse recognizes the need for lifelong learning and participates in continuing nursing education.

5.4 The nurse is active in updating her knowledge and skills at regular intervals to enhance professional competence.

5.5 The nurse observes occupational health and safety at work, and observes the health and safety rules for fostering self and other colleagues' wellbeing and safety in practice situations.

6. **Foster the trust that is inherent in the privileged relationship between nurses and their patients/clients**

6.1 The nurse fosters a therapeutic relationship with patients/clients and their families and is vigilant that such a relationship is not abused.

6.2 The nurse promotes and preserves the trust from their patients/clients and does not cause his/her patients/clients any physical or psychological harm.

6.3 The nurse does not abuse his/her patients'/clients' property.

7. **Uphold the image of nurses and the profession by refusing advantages**

7.1 The nurse declines any gift, favor or hospitality offered for the purpose of obtaining preferential treatment.

7.2 The nurse ensures that his/her professional status is not misused in the promotion of commercial products or services.

7.3 The nurse ensures that his/her professional judgment is not influenced by any commercial considerations.

7.4 The nurse declares to the appropriate authority any financial or other interests in accordance with prevailing laws and regulations.

8. **Practise in accordance with laws of Hong Kong relevant to the area of nursing practice**

8.1 The nurse observes the laws of Hong Kong relevant to nursing and health care practices. Some examples of such are listed in the Annex.

Annex : Some Examples of Laws of Hong Kong Related to Nursing Practice

There are many ordinances which have a direct or indirect application to nursing. The following is a selected list of ordinances related to nursing practice. It is not intended to be exhaustive:

<u>Name of Ordinance</u>	<u>Chapter</u>
Antibiotics Ordinance	137
Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance	174
Coroners Ordinance	504
Dangerous Drugs Ordinance	134
Defamation Ordinance	21
Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance	383
Hospital Authority Ordinance	113
Hospitals, Nursing Homes and Maternity Homes Registration Ordinance	165
Human Organ Transplant Ordinance	465
Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance	1
Medical (Therapy, Education and Research) Ordinance	278
Mental Health Ordinance	136
Midwives Registration Ordinance	162
Nurses Registration Ordinance	164
Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance	509
Offences Against the Person Ordinance	212
Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance	486
Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance	138
Prevention of Bribery Ordinance	201
Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Ordinance	141

Code of Ethics for Nurses in Hong Kong

The Code of Ethics for Nurses in Hong Kong aims to make explicit the fundamental moral commitments of the profession; provide nurses with a basis for ethical practice, and to indicate to the community the values that nurses hold.

The Code of Ethics for Nurses in Hong Kong is organized around four broad value statements and seventeen provisions that represent the morals and ideals of the profession and are regarded as central to ethical nursing practice. The four broad value statements are:

1. Respect life, and improve quality of life
2. Respect individual rights and dignity
3. Be responsive to society's needs, and work towards a healthy community through partnership
4. Strive for excellence, and assure quality of care

The provisions articulated in each value statement are ethical responsibilities that nurses should act upon in order to enact the broad values in practice situations. For each of these statements, the scope of responsibilities identified extends beyond individuals to include families, communities and society. By upholding these values in practice, it is envisaged that nurses can improve their personal quality, provide quality nursing care and earn the trust of those under their care.

These value statements are based on the following general principles :

- People's needs are universal. Nursing service is provided for people throughout their life span.
- Inherent in nursing is the respect for life, dignity and rights of individuals, and improvement in the quality of life.
- Nurses should serve all people irrespective of race, nationality, creed, color, age, gender, politics or social status.
- The fundamental responsibilities of nurses are to promote health, prevent illness, restore health, and alleviate suffering caused by ill health.

1 Respect Life, and Improve Quality of Life

- 1.1 Nurses should encourage the individual, the family and the community to improve the quality of life.
- 1.2 Nurses should ensure patient/client safety when delivering nursing services.
- 1.3 Nurses should provide information and consultation in accordance with and adjustable to patients'/clients' and their families' capacity and needs.
- 1.4 Nurses should respect the wishes of the dying patients/clients, and ensure that they have peace and dignity at the time of death.

2 **Respect Individual Rights and Dignity**

- 2.1 Nurses should respect the individual's spiritual beliefs, values and customs.
- 2.2 Nurses should hold in confidence patients'/clients' information and be prudent in their use of the information.
- 2.3 Nurses should respect patients'/clients' and their families' wishes, encouraging them to participate in planning and implementing nursing care.
- 2.4 Nurses should take appropriate action to safeguard the individual's rights and dignity.
- 2.5 Nurses should value truthfulness and integrity and put oneself in the place of another.

3 **Be Responsive to Society's Needs, and Work towards a Healthy Community Through Partnership**

- 3.1 Nurses should share the responsibility in raising the health consciousness of the community.
- 3.2 Nurses should collaborate with others in initiating and supporting actions that work towards the goal of 'health for all'.
- 3.3 Nurses should use health care resources efficiently and effectively through partnerships with the community.
- 3.4 Nurses should coordinate their services with those of medical and social groups in rendering health services to individuals, families and the community, as appropriate.

4 **Strive for Excellence, and Assure Quality of Care**

- 4.1 Nurses should seek truth from facts, and use scientific evidence in finding the best possible ways to provide nursing services for the wellbeing of patients/clients.
- 4.2 Nurses should maintain the highest standards of nursing care possible, actually seeking improvement on the existing service.
- 4.3 Nurses should exercise professional judgement in accepting responsibilities and delegating nursing activities to others.
- 4.4 Nurses should value research and development for the promotion of nursing knowledge and skills.

Appendix : References

1. Code of Ethics – American College of Healthcare Executives 1995
2. Code of Ethics for nurses in Australia - Australian Nursing Council Inc. 1999
3. Code of Professional Conduct for nurses in Australia - Australian Nursing Council Inc. 1999
4. Code of Professional Conduct – United Kingdom Central Council 1992
5. Code for Nurses – International Council of Nurses 1973
6. Daly, B.J. “Ethics Why a New Code?” American Journal of Nursing, Vol. 99 No. 6
7. Fowler, M.D. 1999 “Ethics Relic or Resource? The Code for Nurses”, American Journal of Nursing, Vol. 99, No. 3, 56-60
8. 余雲楚，彭美慈。專業守則：實務或霸權？評「香港護士專業守則」。文思慧，梁美儀（主編）。專業交叉點 - 專業倫理的理念與實行。香港：青文書局，2000:66-101。
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