

## **Professionalism in Nursing**

There are many professions and disciplines in which professionalism is of the utmost importance, and nursing is among them. Within the field of nursing, there is much value to be placed with the enhancement of professionalism within the profession. Nursing is a profession that relies on practitioners to act in a way that represents the virtuousness of the broader discipline, as all nurses are in a position of responsibility. The following essay will further examine the topic of professionalism in nursing, and from this it will be clear that professionalism among nurses is of the utmost importance, and nursing educators need to emphasize this fact early on, so that nurses can establish professional tendencies that will follow them throughout their career.

More than any other profession, nursing has long been concerned with establishing professional values and behaviours within their discipline. Nurses are people that work within the medical industry, and therefore they see people all of different types, with different medical conditions. There is an inherent need for equality and human dignity, and this is part of the expectation of professionalism that nurses have. Additionally, the nursing industry is broad, encompassing different people in different situations, but there needs to be something that binds them all as nurses. This is where professionalism comes in. For example, in North America most people have faith that wherever they are, there is competent medical care available. This includes nurses, and therefore there needs to be a level of professionalism which links nurses everywhere so that people can continue to have faith that wherever they go, they can count on the availability of quality medical care (Kasar & Clark, 2000: 5-6).

Professionals in the nursing field are those nurses that understand that their discipline extends beyond the individual, and it is the collection of nurses throughout the nursing community that create the industry. Nurses need to understand that they are a team, and they must all work together – not just with each other, but also with other members of their health care community, from physicians to administrators. According to Girard et al., (2005: 3) “Professional nursing practice is a commitment to compassion, caring and strong ethical values; continuous development of self and others; accountability and responsibility for insightful practice; demonstrating a spirit of collaboration and flexibility.”

There are lots of expectations that fall upon nurses who seek to be professional in their practice. To begin with, nurses must understand that they are working within a broader profession, and therefore they must act in accordance with professional guidelines that have been set for them. In Ontario, it is expected that all nurses abide by the *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*. Nurses should also ensure that they have the training, experience and skills needed to perform the tasks that they are expected to perform. This includes having an understanding of the theoretical frameworks which have come to shape the discipline over the years. For example, a professional nurse should have an understanding of Jean Watson’s Theory of Care, and the impact that it has had on the development of nursing practice. By having grounding in nursing theory, nurses are better able to make the best decisions in the course of their daily practice, and this contributes to their overall professionalism (RNAO, 2007).

A further component of nursing which is essential to professionalism is quality care. Nurses are expected to give the best possible care to all clients, regardless of the

situation or who they are. Professionalism means that all nurses treat everybody equally, and do their best to ensure that the highest quality care is being provided. This includes a dedication to principles of justice, honesty, respect and integrity. When people require the care of nurses, they do not necessarily personally know the nurse that will be giving them care, but there is always an expectation that the nurse will provide good care, whoever the nurse is, and this expectation is a consequence of the professional reputation that nurses have garnered, and it is important that nurses continue to warrant this professional reputation (RNAO, 2007).

Nursing professionalism stems from nurses developing their practice. This means that nurses need to work to educate others about the role of nurses within the health care sector, as well as lead by example. Nursing professionalism requires that those who work within the industry are leaders, and this facilitates the passage of professional tendencies from older and more experienced nurses to newer nurses. Overall, nurses need to conduct themselves in a way that is good for the profession; a way that reflects well on all nurses, not just the individual. This works to give nurses and nursing the reputation of professionalism, and further serves to benefit the profession (Clark, 2008: 12-14).

Beyond these things, there are also many more factors that contribute to the overall professionalism in nurses, and these factors are so important because people inherently trust that nurses are professional. As such, appearance goes a long way in maintaining the image of being a professional. To begin with, nurses must understand that their appearance says a lot about them. Nobody wants to go to a hospital or a clinic and see a nurse that is not well put together. By putting forth a clean and professional appearance, people will automatically feel at ease with the situation they are in, and will

more likely to be cooperative throughout the process. Furthermore, a professional does not discriminate against people; they treat everyone the same – whether they are doctors, patients, janitors or administrators. It is important not to facilitate a hierarchy within the organization that you work in. A nurse also needs to continually improve. Just because a nurse has finished their training, does not mean that they are done learning. Becoming an excellent service provider means continually learning from the experiences you have, and building on them to provide quality care in the future. In fact, professionals realize that formal training is only part of the process. When they are on the job, they realize that they will continue to learn, from their experiences and those around them. True professionals capitalize on the experiences that they have, and leverage them to become better nurses with each passing day. Finally, nurses must always give their best effort. It is not acceptable for nurses to only give a partial effort on some days. Regardless of how “well” a nurse is feeling on any particular day, it is important for the pursuit of professionalism that nurses are able to provide excellence, day in and day out (Staples, 2009).

Professionalism is not something that comes easy, and therefore it is important that nurses evaluate themselves on a continual basis to ensure that they are maintaining the standards that make them professional. There are a number of questions that a nurse can ask themselves each day. The first is whether or not they are being professional. The reality is that most people are aware whether or not their actions constitute as being professional. For example, if a nurse wears a dirty or unkempt uniform to the hospital, they know they are being unprofessional. By undergoing a process of self-evaluation, a nurse can determine, on a daily basis, what they can do to improve themselves and

become more professional. For example, if a nurse has a dirty uniform, they need to ask figure out why this is the case. Maybe it is just an isolated incident and it is unlikely to happen again, but maybe it is something that happens often, in which case the nurse will need to take a step back and figure out what can be done to prevent this from happening on a regular basis. A nurse also needs to look within themselves to determine if they are treating others with the respect that they deserve. It is important to understand that nursing is a team game, and all the members of the team rely on each other. For example, a nurse could not provide quality care if the janitor did not do his or her part. For this reason, nurses need to continually ask themselves if they are treating others with the level of professionalism that they would expect to be treated. In many cases, this self-evaluation will show that they have been treating others professionally, but it might also show that there are improvements to be made. Finally, nurses need to continually ask themselves how an increased level of professionalism could improve the workplace. There are often small steps that can be taken to make a big difference, and by re-evaluating oneself on a daily basis, a nurse can identify what they are doing well, and where improvements can be made for the purpose of improving professionalism (Staples, 2009).

While all nurses have a role to play in creating professionalism, there are some barriers that stand in the way. One of the major barriers is a difference in educational background among nurses. Different nurses have different levels of education, and this can serve to divide, but nurses ought to work to minimize the effects of educational disparity among them. Further, gender issues can serve as a barrier to professionalism. Nursing has long been thought of as female-dominated (or “women’s work”), but now

more than ever, men are entering the profession, and equality among the sexes in the profession is something that will serve to increase professionalism as well. These are just two of main barriers that stand in the way of professionalism in nursing, but these barriers and others do not stand in the way of professionalism, rather they are just reasons for nurses to work harder for the benefit of the reputation of their profession (Chitty, 2005: 168-9).

Overall, it can be seen that maintaining professionalism in nursing is essential to the profession. Nurses put themselves in positions of trust each and everyday, and therefore it is essential that the people that rely on the care of nurses are confident that they are being cared for by professionals. There are barriers to professionalism in the nursing industry, but they can be overcome if nurses work together toward a common goal. This essay has shown that professionalism among nurses is of the utmost importance, and nursing educators need to emphasize this fact early on so that nurses can establish professional tendencies that will follow them throughout their career.

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