

# NURSING



Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Transforming patient care through professional practice

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A newsletter from the office of the Executive Chief Nursing Officer

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## ETHICS SURVEY RESULTS REPORTED

In July, VUMC nurses were invited to complete an online survey on the ethical issues they encounter in their practice. The survey, answered by 441 nurses, was a collaboration between nursing and researchers from the Center for Biomedical Ethics and Society and the Department of Sociology.

The survey results represent a substantial increase in our knowledge about the ethical issues nurses face in their daily practice. Tables 1 and 2 (on the following page) present the most- and least-common responses to questions concerning ethical issues that might arise in nursing practice and areas in which nurses felt additional educational activities were needed. Presenting the data in this way provides a sense of where support is most needed, and where ethical issues are being addressed most easily.

Table 1 provides some insights into the areas of clinical practice that are most troublesome for nurses. As these tables indicate, more than 70 percent of respondents identified the care of non-English

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As we usher in the fall, we also are setting course for a new direction at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. As Vice Chancellor Jeff Balser, Ph.D., M.D., said in his recent State of the Medical Center address: “We are a player in health care, with a real opportunity to be a dominant leader and we need to think about what it means to be one of the most influential places in the country.”

I urge you to think about your role in making VUMC the top academic medical center in the country. Our special combination of clinical care, education and research can make a profound difference in the lives of each of our patients, their families and throughout the world.

In this issue, we share the preliminary results of the ethics study conducted in July. Thank you to everyone who participated in the survey as it provided us valuable information for going forward as we increase patient loads and complexity of care.

Additionally, and on a much lighter note, thank you to our wonderfully talented nurses who entertained us for four shows of “Hey Florence!” I hope everyone got a chance to attend this very special offering from Cultural Enrichment and the Nurse Wellness Committee.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Sincerely,

speaking patients as an issue of ethical concern. Similarly, care for non-English speakers was the area where nurses felt the most need for additional education and training activities.

Echoing the majority, one nurse wrote, “My No. 1 concern

Other commonly cited areas of concern were with conflicts among caregivers, family disagreements, the care of patients with different cultural beliefs, and end-of-life issues.

When speaking about end-of-life issues, one nurse commented, “Science has helped us prolong the body but not the mind. I feel that we need to look more at the whole patient and not just fixate on the problem of the moment. I honestly and truly feel that sometimes the best care we can give is no care, just comfort measures.”

While the top five areas for concern and further education match, the categories of least

concern vary.

In Table 2, for example, 22 percent of respondents listed legal issues as an ethical concern that arises in daily practice, yet 30 percent of respondents indicated they would prefer more education on these issues (legal issues rank No. 7 on the list of areas where additional educational activities are needed).

At this point, the research team is compiling and coding the written comments nurses offered to questions about these ethical issues, and this will provide a more detailed picture of where the problems of greatest concern lie, and

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**Table 1: Rank and Order of Ethical Issue Frequency and Need for Education—Areas of Most Concern**

Variable	Rank Question 1: Ethical Issues that arise at VUMC*	Percent responding “Yes” to Question 1	Rank Question 2: Ethical issues where additional education activities are needed	Percent responding “Yes” to Question 2
Caring for non-English speakers	1	72%	1	55%
Communication/conflicts among caregivers	2	61%	3	45%
Family disagreements	3	57%	4 (tie)	37%
Caring for patients with different cultural or ethnic beliefs about health care	4	53%	2	46%
End of life	5	46%	4 (tie)	37%

\* Top 5 out of 20

is regarding translation of care with non-English speaking patients. While we do have sufficient resources for translation services, I don't feel that all nursing and medical staff are adequately equipped to ensure that these families leave each encounter feeling well informed and secure.”

**Table 2: Rank and Order of Ethical Issue Frequency and Need for Education—Areas of Least Concern**

Variable	Rank Question 1: Ethical Issues that arise at VUMC*	Percent responding “Yes” to Question 1	Rank Question 2: Ethical issues where additional education activities are needed	Percent responding “Yes” to Question 2
Truth telling	16	27%	16	20%
Legal issues	17	22%	7	30%
Surrogate decision making	18	19%	17	18%
Conflicts of interest	19	19%	19	17%
Other areas	20	8%	20	4%

\* Lowest 5 out of 20

what institutional responses would be helpful.

Table 3 reports the results of questions about nurses' awareness and use of resources that may help resolve ethical issues.

More than 60 percent of respondents are unable to find the resources they need in order to address the ethical challenges that they face in the workplace.

This is a strong indicator that efforts to educate nurses about the available resources are needed and would be welcome.

While nurses were not always able to find

the resources they needed to address ethical concerns, the majority reported feeling somewhat prepared to deal with the ethical challenges faced in the workplace.

Table 4 shows that 55 percent reported they did not know how to contact the Ethics Consultation Service, the service that assists with clinical ethical issues at the bedside.

It appears there is a need for additional training about the procedures for contacting the Ethics Consultation Service.

by Larry Churchill, Ph.D., Ann Geddes Stahlman Professor of Medical Ethics, and Dan Morrison, Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology

**Table 3: Resource Use and Preparation for Ethical Challenges by Role (N)**

Question		Nurse Leader	Staff Nurse	Advanced Practice Nurse	Research Nurse	Total
Are you able to find resources for addressing ethical challenges while at VUMC?	Yes	19% (12)	39% (101)	32% (21)	19% (5)	33% (139)
	No	82% (52)	61% (160)	68% (44)	81% (21)	67% (277)
How prepared do you feel in dealing with ethical challenges you face in your daily work?	Fully prepared	16% (10)	23% (62)	17% (12)	31% (8)	22% (92)
	Somewhat prepared	77% (49)	68% (181)	80% (55)	62% (16)	71% (301)
	Somewhat unprepared	3% (2)	8% (20)	3% (2)	4% (1)	6% (25)
	Unprepared	5% (3)	1% (2)	0	4% (1)	1% (6)

**Table 4: Knowledge of Ethics Resources by Role (N)**

Question		Nurse Leader	Staff Nurse	Advanced Practice Nurse	Research Nurse	Total
Do you know who represents nursing on the VUMC Ethics Committee?	Yes	22% (14)	9% (25)	3% (2)	12% (3)	10% (44)
	No	78% (50)	91% (240)	97% (67)	88% (22)	90% (388)
Do you know how to contact the Ethics Consultation Service at VUMC?	Yes	68% (44)	40% (105)	46% (31)	56% (14)	45% (194)
	No	32% (21)	60% (160)	54% (36)	44% (11)	55% (237)
Do you know how to contact the VUMC Ethics Committee?	Yes	59% (38)	35% (92)	45% (30)	40% (10)	40% (173)
	No	42% (27)	65% (172)	55% (37)	60% (15)	60% (257)

\*percentages reported may not equal 100 due to rounding

## Future ethics education in planning stages

The ethics survey represents one of the first efforts to gather systematic data from nurses regarding their experience with ethical issues in the workplace.

As such, the researchers involved in the study have more work ahead, involving both the statistical data and the qualitative comments nurses provided.

This work will guide efforts by Vanderbilt nursing leaders and the Center for Biomedical Ethics and Society in developing future educational opportunities for nurses.

Look for announcements in late winter and early spring of 2010 that will likely involve a variety of events, ranging from small group meetings to grand rounds.

Watch the VUMC Nursing Newsletter for announcements about how you can develop your skills in recognizing and responding to ethical concerns at work.

## CONTACTING THE ETHICS CONSULTATION SERVICE

All VUMC nurses, regardless of their role within the hospitals and clinics, are encouraged to make use of the Ethics Consultation Service when they have an ethical question or concern. Ethics consultations are available to all members of the care team, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Ethics faculty and trainees from the Center for Biomedical Ethics and Society staff the Ethics Consultation Service. Jeffrey Bishop, M.D., Ph.D., serves as director. At any given time, a faculty member and student trainee are “on call” to meet the needs of nurses and other care team members. Consultants come from an array of disciplinary backgrounds, including law, medicine, philosophy, religion and ethics, and the social sciences.



Bishop

In the past, consultations have involved these issues identified by nurses as causing ethical concern in their daily work. For example, ethics consultants have been called to advise families and care team members about decision-making, end-of-life care, and conflicts between members of the care team itself.

Nurses who have identified an issue of concern are asked to page the Ethics Consultation Service at 831-8603.

## CONTACTING THE VUMC ETHICS COMMITTEE

Another resource for nurses is the multidisciplinary Ethics Committee. Its mission has three parts: reviewing existing and proposed hospital policies related to clinical and organizational ethics, making recommendations to promote ethical practice, and sponsoring educational activities aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge of ethical issues throughout the Medical Center.

Five of the committee’s 27 members are nurses: Carol Eck, R.N., M.B.A. (Cancer Center); Nancy Feistritzer, R.N., M.S.N. (Administration); Susie Leming-Lee, R.N., M.S.N., C.P.H.Q. (Perioperative Quality Management), Janie Parmley, R.N., M.S.N., B.C. (Home Care), and Lindsey Robertson, R.N., B.S.N. (SICU).

The committee also considers questions—specific or broad—from the VUMC community. Contact co-chairs, Elizabeth Heitman, Ph.D., (936-3686) or Meg Rush, M.D., (322-3476) or a committee member. The committee meets from 4 to 5 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month, and guests are welcome by prior arrangement.

## OCTOBERFEST IS HERE

Octoberfest 2009 runs Oct. 19-22. Most events offer contact hour opportunities, and each day will feature activities and lectures highlighting the day's theme.

Monday - Diversity

Tuesday - Self-care: Body, Mind & Soul

Wednesday - Evidence Based Practice Research Day

Thursday - Shared Governance Nursing Summit



[CLICK HERE  
TO REGISTER FOR  
OCTOBERFEST](#)

## AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS

- ❶ The nurse, in all professional relationships, practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and uniqueness of every individual, unrestricted by considerations of social or economic status, personal attributes, or the nature of health problems.
- ❷ The nurse's primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group or community.
- ❸ The nurse promotes, advocates for, and strives to protect the health, safety and rights of the patient.
- ❹ The nurse is responsible and accountable for individual nursing practice and determines the appropriate delegation of tasks consistent with the nurse's obligation to provide optimum patient care.
- ❺ The nurse owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to preserve integrity and safety, to maintain competence, and to continue personal professional growth.
- ❻ The nurse participates in establishing, maintaining and improving health care environments and conditions of employment conducive to the provision of quality health care and consistent with the values of the profession through individual and collective action.
- ❼ The nurse participates in the advancement of the profession through contributions to practice, education, administration and knowledge development.
- ❽ The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public in promoting community, national and international efforts to meet health needs.
- ❾ The profession of nursing, as represented by associations and their members, is responsible for articulating nursing values, for maintaining the integrity of the profession and its practice, and for shaping social policy.

*Source: ANA, www.nursingworld.org*

## Announcements and Events

A Suggestion Box for VUMC employees is now available online. [Click here to submit a comment](#)

Preview tours of the Critical Care Tower will be offered Oct. 16 - Nov. 2. [Click here to register](#)