

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background and Significance of the Problem**

Ethical dilemmas are complex and frequently related to health care systems and changes in society, politics, and economics. As a result of advances in science and technology, more ethical problems and dilemmas surrounding health care issues have been identified in clinical practice (Bunch, 2002; Dinc & Gorgulu, 2002; Gold, Chambers, & Dvorak, 1995; Raines, 1994). Also, the growing demand for health service and the increasing use of technology are factors that are challenging health professionals to solve the problem when encountering ethical dilemmas (Bunch, 2002; McDaniel, 1998; Nolan & Markert, 2002).

Nurses and nursing students are involved in ethical dilemmas in their daily practice. Several studies reported that nurses faced ethical dilemmas during clinical practice. For example, Killen (2002) reported that peri-operative nurses appeared to have difficulty in differentiating between legal and ethical issues related to informed consent. This study found that ethical dilemmas identified in patient care situations were related to issues of truth telling, end of life care, abortion, abuse of children, confidentiality, and privacy. Post (1996) found that ethical dilemmas in the postoperative phase occurred concerning issues of truth telling, patient autonomy, and the limits of fidelity to the

patient. Similarly, Botes and Otto (2003) identified ethical issues in HIV-positive persons related to issues of autonomy, beneficence, justice, and confidentiality.

Seeking to understand the conditions in which nursing students encounter ethical dilemmas in clinical practice has been discussed in many recent studies. According to Chaowalit, Suttharangsee, and Takviriyannun (1999), seven themes of ethical dilemmas experienced by Thai nursing students were identified including (1) protecting patient rights vs. lack of self autonomy, (2) values conflicts in professional roles, (3) professional obligations/respect of authority vs. duty for self, (4) truth telling vs. withholding the truth, (5) maintaining patient's confidentiality vs. protecting others from harm, (6) prolonging life vs. prolonging suffering, and (7) lack of cooperation/relationship.

Nolan and Markert's study (2002) reported the areas of potential ethical dilemmas mentioned by nursing students included abortion, use of life support machines, euthanasia, truth telling, religious beliefs, blood transfusion, organ donation, patient noncompliance, and acceptance of professional decisions. Similarly, the findings of Nolan and Smith's study (1995) showed that the major ethical dilemmas in health care for medical and nursing students related to the issues of abortion, prolonging life, assisting death (including euthanasia), resource allocation (both time and money), health services management, and research using animal and human subjects.

Ethical dilemmas create feelings of discomfort for nurses and nursing students during clinical practice. For instance, Grundstein-Amando (1992) found that feelings of insecurity and powerlessness have a profound effect on nurses' perceptions and attitudes in the face of ethical dilemmas. Other studies described the initial moral distress when

nurses encounter nursing situations and experience difficulty in carrying out moral responsibilities and important roles (Casterle, Grypdonck, Vuylsteke-Wauters, & Janssen, 1997; Raines, 2000). The experience itself typically involves negative feelings such as anger, frustration and guilt (Corley, 2002; Fry, Harvey, Huley, & Foley, 2002), moral distress (Davis, 1982; Kalvemmark, Hoglund, Hansson, Westerholm, & Arnetz, 2004). LaMear-Tucker and Friedson (1997) also reported that moral conflict is often managed inadequately and can lead to feelings of powerlessness, anger, and frustration.

Being confronted with complex ethical dilemmas in practice supposes nursing students develop their thinking to analyze, evaluate and resolve ethical dilemmas using ethical theories and principles (Botes & Otto, 2003; Han & Ahn, 2000). Nursing students used a variety of strategies to cope with ethical distress. These strategies included planned problem solving and the use of support resources, which nursing students rated as the source of the greatest support. To a lesser extent, negative coping strategies of distancing and escape/avoidance occur in nursing practice (Corley, 2002; Raines, 2000). Another study reported that senior student nurses adopt the bureaucratic-centred rather than the patient-centred to approach in resolving ethical dilemmas (Swider, McMurry, & Yarling, 1985).

Education is a basic preparation to achieve professional values and promote the center for learning the resolution of ethical dilemmas of nursing students in clinical practice (Brocoop et al., 2003; Dinc & Gorgulu, 2002; Shake-Katefian, Pancharoenworakul, & Yunibhand, 2001). Furthermore, Dinc and Gorgulu (2002) stated that teaching of ethics in nursing education has become increasingly important to train

students to participate in the resolution of ethical dilemmas. A clearer understanding and acknowledgment of the ethical dilemmas and resolutions will help faculty and students to cope with the feelings and needs of the students more sensitively (Windsor, 1987).

In Indonesia, ethics teaching in nursing education is to prepare students to be professional nurses who are able to deal effectively with ethical dilemmas in clinical practice. Also, the purpose of ethics course is to enable nursing students to analyze and respond to complex issues in practices related to their responsibilities. To achieve this objective, ethics courses have been provided in Diploma of Nursing programs in Indonesia.

The ethics courses include ethics contents and teaching strategies based on theoretical contents that are mentioned in the curriculum (Suheri, Dwidiyanti, & Hartati, 1999). The teaching methods of each school are different and most of them have demonstrated only theoretical content of ethical dilemmas and ethical decision-making based on their syllabi. According to the syllabi of diploma nursing program, there does not mention other strategies for resolutions of ethical dilemmas. The teaching of nursing ethics frequently becomes purely academic. As a result of interview with Indonesian nursing students in clinical practice, most students in Indonesia do not have adequate skills in dealing effectively with ethical dilemmas. Therefore, there is a need to explore students' experiences in ethical dilemmas, as well as their resolutions of ethical dilemmas in clinical practice.

From a review literature in this area, the researcher have not found any studies addressing ethical dilemmas and resolutions of ethical dilemmas of nursing students in

Indonesia. This study examine the ethical dilemmas and resolutions of ethical dilemmas that nursing students encounter in clinical practice. Therefore, results from this study will be used to improve ethics teaching through understanding of ethical dilemmas and resolutions of ethical dilemmas that are encountered by nursing students in Indonesia.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify frequency of ethical dilemmas that nursing students encounter in clinical practice in Health Polytechnic Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia.
2. To identify level of disturbance of ethical dilemmas that nursing students encounter in clinical practice in Health Polytechnic Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia.
3. To identify frequency of resolutions that nursing students use when encountering ethical dilemmas in clinical practice in Health Polytechnic Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia.

### **Research Questions**

1. How frequently are the ethical dilemmas in clinical practice encountered by nursing students in Health Polytechnic Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia?
2. What are the levels of disturbance caused by the ethical dilemmas encountered in clinical practice by nursing students in Health Polytechnic Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia?

3. How frequently do the nursing students in Health Polytechnic Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia use each resolution strategy when encountering the ethical dilemmas in clinical practice?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual framework of this study is mainly based on previous studies regarding ethical dilemmas/ethical problems and resolutions in nursing practice conducted by Chaowalit, Suttharangsee, and Takviriyannun (1999), Chaowalit, Suttharangsee, and Inthanont (2001), and Chaowalit, Hatthakit, Nasae, Suttharangsee, and Parker (2002).

In addition, literature regarding ethical dilemmas/issues, and resolutions in nursing practice was reviewed and used to develop the framework (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; Baggs & Schmitt, 2000; Catalano, 2003; Davis, Aroskar, Liaschenko, & Drought, 1997; Han & Ahn, 2000; Mallik & McHale, 1995; Nolan & Smith, 1995).

Six ethical dilemmas proposed for this study include: (1) professional obligations vs. protecting self from harm, (2) maintaining patient confidentiality vs. warning others from harm, (3) truth telling vs. withholding the truth, (4) advocating for patients vs. lacking authority, (5) values conflicts in professional roles, and (6) prolonging life vs. ending life decisions.

Professional obligation vs. protecting self from harm is a conflict of advanced practice in nursing. Professional obligations vs. protecting self from harm occurs when nurses confront the conflict between their responsibility as members of the nursing

profession, while nurses have duty to self for protecting self from harm (Catalano, 2003; Davis, Aroskar, Liaschencko, & Drought, 1997).

Dilemmas in relation to maintaining patient confidentiality vs. warning others from harm arise from the health care practitioner's duty and the obligation to protect the patient from undesirable interactions (Botes & Otto, 2002; Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). The obligation of maintaining confidentiality will be a dilemma in nursing practice when confidentiality may be harmful for other people. For example, should nurses maintain confidentiality when patients request to disclose to their family regarding HIV, since maintaining confidentiality may be harmful for their spouse in related to becoming infected.

Truth telling involves the provision of information to patient and their family to enable them to make informed choices not only about health care and other aspects of patient's life but also inform them about the patient's situation (Hebert, Hoffmaker, Glass, & Singer, 1997). A dilemma of truth telling occurs when there are some considerations between obligation to tell the truth to respect for autonomy and some considerations to the patients to withhold information regarding terminal illness, and availability of treatment that might be harmful for the patient (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; Miyaji, 1993).

Advocating for patients vs. lacking authority is an ethical dilemma when nurses take their advocate role. As advocate, a nurse should consider the basic human values of the patient and then act to protect the patient's human dignity, privacy, and choices (Fry, 1994). Mallik (1997) stated, "Whilst nurses may make moral choices they may lack the

authority to undertake moral actions.” Mallik and McHale (1995) reported advocacy may create conflict between the nurse’s wish to support the patient’s rights and nurse’s ability to carry this forward within a bureaucratic health-care system.

Values conflicts in professional roles occur because of internal or interpersonal conflict in nurses’ roles that can subsequently affect patient care (Burkhardt & Nathaniel, 2001). Moral and nonmoral values can conflict with one another and with patients’ rights and professional duties (Fry & Johnstone, 2002). When personal values are at odds with those of patients, colleagues or the institution, internal or interpersonal conflict may result.

The issue of prolonging life vs. ending life decisions is a serious conflict especially with regard to patients with terminal illnesses (Baggs & Schmitt, 2000; Davis Aroskar, Liaschenko, & Drought, 1997; Kjervik, 1991). The quality of life and humaneness of the terminal stage in a patient’s life, the increased possibilities of prolong life, uncertainty about patient’s prognosis, patient’s suffering, and family member’s decisions are all factors that may increase the complexity of conflicts regarding prolonging life vs. ending life (Kjervik, 1991; Kuuppelomaki, 2002).

The strategies for resolving ethical dilemmas for this study are as follows: (1) taking moral actions, (2) discussing and consulting with others, and (3) emotional coping strategies.

Taking moral actions is an awareness of ethical principles to provide answer to the infinite number of dilemmas (Fry & Johnstone, 2002; Hyland, 2002). Actions for dealing with dilemmas were based on expected outcome of the actions (Chaowalit,



Hatthakit, Suttharangsee, Nasae, & Parker, 2002). Gatsmans (2002, p.495) stated, "The ethical quality of actions is largely determined by the ethical qualities of the agents whose actions they are."

Discussing and consulting with others about ethical dilemmas may often guide health providers in solving ethical problems in nursing practice (Bartter, 2001; Gold, Chambers, & Dvorak, 1995). Discussing and consulting with others might be conducted among nurses or with physicians, patients, patients' families, and administrators (Alderson, Farsides, & Williams, 2002; Bailey, 2002). Discussing and consulting others is justified in terms of the importance to deal with ethical dilemmas in nursing practice. Nurses usually try to overcome ethical dilemmas by consulting physicians or nurse peers, by bringing to attention of a higher-ranking officer, or by strong advocacy for the best care for the patient (Fry, Harvey, Hurley, & Foley, 2002). Tschudin and Schmitz (2003) describe that nursing students have a duty to see that their complaints are effectively addressed and identify the best person, such as a senior person with sufficient authority or faculty members.

Emotional coping strategies such as expressing feelings, thinking positively, and acceptance minimize the conflicts among nurses when confronting ethical dilemmas (Chaowalit, Hatthakit, Suttharangsee, Nasae, & Parker, 2002). Emotional coping strategies are as natural elements within health care to manage ethical distress when nurses confront dilemmas (Casterle, Meulenbergs, Vijver, Tanghe, & Gastman, 2002; Corley, 2002).

## **Definitions of Term**

An ethical dilemma is a difficult situation where involves two or more ethical principles that are incompatible, which is encountered by nursing students in clinical practice. Ethical dilemmas in this study consist of (1) advocating for patients vs. lacking autonomy, (2) values conflicts in professional roles, (3) maintaining patient confidentiality vs. warning others from harm, (4) professional obligations vs. protecting self from harm, (5) truth telling vs. withholding the truth, and (6) prolonging life vs. ending life decisions. Ethical dilemmas in this study were measured by an instrument modified by the researcher based on (1) the Ethical Dilemmas and Resolutions of Ethical Dilemmas Questionnaire developed by Chaowalit, Suttharangsee, & Inthanont (2001), (2) literature review, and (3) focus group interviews with Indonesian nursing students.

A resolution of ethical dilemma is a strategy or method that nursing students use to resolve an ethical dilemma. Resolutions of ethical dilemma consist of (1) taking moral actions, (2) discussing and consulting with others, and (3) emotional coping strategies. Resolutions of Ethical Dilemmas were measured by an instrument modified by the researcher based on (1) the Ethical Dilemmas and Resolutions of Ethical Dilemmas Questionnaire developed by Chaowalit, Suttharangsee, & Inthanont (2001), (2) literature review, and (3) focus group interviews with Indonesian nursing students.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is useful for nursing education, and nursing research.

### **1. Nursing Education**

Nurse educators can use the results of this study to develop appropriate teaching-learning methods to enhance students' ability in dealing with ethical dilemmas. Nurse educators can provide ethics teaching that will be specific to students' needs to deal with ethical dilemmas in clinical practice. As a result, nursing students will be prepared to be more aware of ethical dilemmas surrounding them in clinical practice and to solve ethical dilemmas more effectively.

### **2. Nursing Research**

The research findings will be useful in developing future research regarding ethical dilemmas and resolutions of ethical dilemmas such as (1) exploring factors associated with ethical dilemmas and resolutions of ethical dilemmas of nursing students, (2) moral distress of nursing students when facing ethical dilemmas, and (3) developing an instrument to measure ethical dilemmas and ethical resolutions in nursing students.