

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of this study and is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on conclusions based on the research findings. The second part presents implications of the findings. Finally, the third part shows future research recommendations.

Conclusions

This study aimed to explore ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making in nursing administration of head nurses by using critical incident analysis. Fifty-three head nurses in regional hospitals, Southern Thailand, were interviewed. Each head nurse was asked to describe critical incidents in nursing administration creating an ethical dilemma, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making experienced as a head nurse. Their incidents were varied and took place in many different wards. One hundred and eight critical incidents in nursing administration, six themes of ethical dilemmas, six themes of ethical decision making, and eighteen themes of outcomes of ethical decision making were identified.

Six themes of ethical dilemmas in nursing administration were: *obligation to manage/improve quality of care for patients vs. obligation to organization/colleagues, advocating subordinates/patients vs. maintaining relationship with the health team, duty to perform head nurse's roles in personnel management vs. follower's duty to organization, whether or not to follow policies/commands which resulted in negative*

consequences for some patients/nurses, having conflict when acting as a mediator, and whether to choose motivation or justice in job performance evaluation.

Six themes of ethical decision making of head nurses were: *following higher authorities, managing for quality of care, maintaining good relationships/avoiding conflict among colleagues, consulting with others to find solutions, working for the nurses' benefit, and following the policy/regulation of the organization.*

Outcomes of ethical decision making were categorized in positive and negative outcomes. Eight themes of positive outcomes were *patients received high quality care, nurses had higher motivation, good relationship between patients and the health team, colleagues had better conducts, nurses had promoted competence, nurses had respected dignity, conflict among colleagues were lessen, and the interest of the ward was protected.* Nine themes of negative outcomes were *head nurses felt pressured in working as a team, ward had incompetent nurse, patients couldn't get good care, patients were not treated equity, nurse's needs were not met, nurses received unfair compensation, ward lose personnel and manpower, nurses were unsatisfied, and colleagues had poor relationship.*

Implications of the Findings

The results of this study are highly relevant to nursing and have important implications for nursing administration and nursing education.

Implication for nursing administration

The findings in this study have implication for nursing administration in Thailand because knowledge in this area has received limited support from research. This study contributes to a better understanding of ethical issues in nursing

administration. The data provide an empirically based description of the critical incidents in nursing administration that induced ethical dilemmas of head nurses, the way head nurses reason and practice in daily ethical dilemmas. Nurse administrators can use this knowledge to improve their ethical decision making skill.

This study found that head nurses felt pressure to follow policies which result in negative consequences for some patients/nurses. Therefore, head nurses and the nurse director should take action to feed back to the policy maker. It is the only way nurse administrators can assure that policies will not become caught in a situation in which they are forced to sacrifice important personal and professional values.

Among the critical incidents of ethical dilemmas and ethical decision making in nursing administration presented by head nurses, they felt pressure in dealing with ethical dilemmas and ethical decision making. Staff development programs should be initiated. Nurse administrators can provide professional context by initiating ethics rounds and the nursing ethics committee. Ethics rounds do not have the purpose to blame anyone, but to reason through a case study ethically. Ethics rounds can establish a climate in which nurses can freely reason through the ethical dilemmas they confront in their practice. In ethics rounds, nurses can deal with both hypothetical cases and cases in progress.

Nurse administrators should support the development of the nursing ethics committee in their hospitals. The nursing ethics committee is intradisciplinary and specifically addresses ethical dilemmas encountered by staff nurses and head nurses. The nursing ethics committee can raise, focus and establish a forum for nurses and head nurses to discuss ethical concerns. Providing education for nurses and head nurse on ways to enhance and facilitate support for those encountering ethical dilemmas and ethical decision making would promote ethical decision making skill

and also assist in developing an ethical climate.

Implication for nursing education

The ethical decision making described by head nurses has implications for nursing administration curricula. Continuing education in nursing ethics needs to be an essential part of nursing graduate curricula. Nursing graduate programs offering degrees in the nursing administration need to explore the current range of ethical dilemmas in nursing administration setting and provide essential coursework to prepare nurse administrators to confront ethical challenges in the healthcare work setting. There is a need to connect ethical theories/principles/concepts and ethical decision making process to the real-life situations in the healthcare setting. Developing these skills could help head nurses to identify important principles and best practices in ethical decision making and to recognize learning embedded in their workplace activities.

Future Research Recommendations

As a result of this investigation, the following specific recommendations are offered:

There needs to be more research done on ethics in nursing administration as administration in the area of nursing profession is anticipated to become of increasing concern. The complex situations generated by technology and the rapidly changing healthcare environment have intensified existing ethical issues and generated new ones.

This study used a qualitative methodology, but quantitative studies could also be conducted on a large scale. Survey tools can be developed to determine if nurse

administrators are facing ethical dilemmas and identify the methods of ethical decision making they are using. Similar studies could be done by interviewing nurse administrators who are working in different hospitals, such as community hospitals or private hospitals to uncover examples of what ethical dilemmas they face and ethical decision making methods are used in these different areas and specialties. This study should also be replicated with head nurses in general hospitals and community hospitals.

In addition, head nurses in this study were not head nurse of ICU. Participants of future research study should be included head of ICU which is critical area.