

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. Summary

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was conducted to describe and explain ethical dilemmas experienced by nurses in intensive care units and the resolutions nurses used in dealing with ethical dilemmas. Ten participants from two public, teaching hospitals in Medan were involved in this study. The period of data collection was from December 2001 to March 2002. In-depth interviews with tape recordings were used to collect the data. Colaizzi's method was modified for data analysis.

The participants in this study described the meaning of ethical dilemma as (1) how to choose between two choices, and (2) a problem that cannot be resolved. Five common ethical dilemmas experienced by nurses in intensive care units in Medan were (1) continue or stop treatment, (2) who should get the ventilator, (3) want to take an action but beyond authority, (4) to tell or not to tell the truth, and (5) acting as patient advocate for patients versus maintaining relationships with the health team. This study also revealed ICU nurses' feelings toward the ethical dilemmas, which included (1) confusion, (2) discomfort, (3) uncertainty, and (4) powerlessness.

When they were facing the dilemmas, the nurses used various strategies to deal with the dilemmas including (1) consultation with doctor and/or nurse supervisor, (2)

discussion with colleagues, (3) performing professional intervention, and (4) religious practices.

## **2. Recommendations**

The findings of this study show that in order to make sound decisions that are appropriate clinically and ethically, ICU nurses need to equip themselves with knowledge of ethics and skills of decision making. This means that the importance of being able to resolve ethical dilemmas when they arise should be emphasized. It is expected that nurses with clinical and ethical skills will provide accountable and high quality nursing care. It is recommended that an ethics course should be included in the training of new critical care nurses and ethical considerations as a part of the nursing process should be emphasized.

The findings of this study have implications for nursing practice, nursing education, and nursing research

### **2.1 Nursing practice**

For nursing practice, the study findings provide critical care nurses with information regarding ethical dilemmas experienced by nurses in intensive care units and the resolutions they used to deal with those ethical dilemmas. Because the findings of this study showed that nurses did not refer to a code of ethics, ethical theories or principles, continual ethics courses are needed to provide a way for nurses to refresh and improve their skills in dealing with ethical dilemmas. Ethical decision making models should be

included in such courses since the study also found a lack of ethical decision making skills. It is also recommended that nurses should be familiar with the Nursing Code of Ethics, as approved by the Indonesian Nurses Association. Finally, if it is possible, an ethics round should be established as a method to make nurses more aware of the ethical aspects of patient care.

## **2.2 Nursing education**

For nursing education, these findings can be used as baseline data regarding ethical dilemmas and the resolutions used by Indonesian nurses, and used in teaching ethics for nursing students and also for other nurses. It is recommended that nurse educators should provide students with ethical decision making skills and provide exercises regarding ethical dilemmas so that the students can apply it in the nursing practice.

## **2.3 Nursing research**

And finally for nursing research, these findings provide data that can be used in developing tools to assess ethical dilemmas for future research. Further research is needed to identify how ICU nurses use ethical decision making in dealing with ethical dilemmas. Because of the limitations of this study, replication of this study is needed.