

BOOK REVIEW

Pera, S.A. & Van Tonder, S. (eds). 2011. Ethics in healthcare. 3rd Edition. Revised by J.M. Oosthuizen and D.M. van der Wal. Lansdowne: Juta.

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Ethics in healthcare was originally published in 1996 under the title “Ethics in nursing practice”. The current third edition is an extensively revised impression. In contrast to many texts in its class, the third edition of “Ethics in healthcare” not only explicates theoretical concepts, ethical theory and ethical decision-making (moral education); it also provides a firm foundation for making these relevant by positing a model of the individual as an ethical/moral and caring agent. In addition, this edition of “Ethics in healthcare”, in support of the model of the individual it proposes, reintroduces virtue ethics (character education), the teaching of ethics and the ethics of teaching.

The arrangement of the 16 chapters of the text into five sections takes the reader systematically from an introduction to ethical theory and an orientation towards the individual as ethical/moral and caring agent, through issues on relationships in healthcare, the importance of culture and religion in healthcare and ethics to a final focus on, and application to, clinical areas including all stages of human life and development, HIV/AIDS, management, teaching and education, and research. In more detail, this journey entails:

- Part 1: Perspectives on healthcare ethics
- Part 2: Perspectives on ethical theory, principles and decision-making in healthcare
- Part 3: Perspectives on rights and relationships in healthcare practice
- Part 4: Perspectives on transcultural issues in healthcare practice; and
- Part 5: Perspectives on ethical issues in healthcare practice.

In addition to the emphasis on selected areas of healthcare practice, the text emphasises other important issues relating to current healthcare practice. Special effort has been made, pertinently and diffusely throughout the text, to return the reader’s attention to the

concept of professional autonomy. Tenets of patient autonomy are applied to illuminate the concept of professional autonomy. Linking with this, patient autonomy is defined in terms of current permissive legislation underscoring the responsibility (and even burden) healthcare practitioners shoulder. The relationship between ethics and law is also addressed, thereby bringing into play all the basic ethical principles.

The fiduciary relationship between the patient/client and the healthcare practitioner is another theme that runs throughout the text. These relationships are sometimes hard hit by demands based on the rights on both sides of the relationship, labour actions and the availability of scarce commodities. The basic ethical principles and associated ethical rules are applied to ethical decision-making, the substance of a moment-to-moment conscious or sub-conscious exercise that both determine and give evidence of the quality of these relationships. The aloofness that could be accompanying distanced, objective and reasoned decision-making is tapered by an appeal for a balanced reinstatement of virtue ethics in the arena of healthcare.

The addition of a new chapter on the teaching of ethics and the ethics of teaching provides the reader with a novel, though a nursing particular, framework for integrating the teaching of ethics diffusely into the whole teaching programme. The processes and ways of expression contained in Carper's (1978) patterns of knowing (empirical, personal, ethical and aesthetical) and Chinn and Cramer's (2008) emancipatory pattern of knowing are proposed as a way in which to involve both educator and student with all course content at an expanded ethical/moral level. Teaching and education as moral actions, according to the authors, form the indisputable foundation of teaching in general, and the teaching of ethics specifically. This notion turns the whole text onto the health sciences educators, appealing to them to account for the way in which they teach as well as to live up to the standard of role models needed in health sciences education to improve the lived experience of students and colleagues in the healthcare arena, thereby improving the internal and external image of healthcare professionals. This would, however, be a futile exercise unless the principles of management ethics and the ethics of teaching are integrated diffusely in the healthcare arena to reach all levels of practitioners in healthcare creating a true inter-hierarchical ethical interface.

Writing a book review for a research journal such as the *African Journal of Nursing and Midwifery*, compels the reviewer to reflect on the association between the focus of the book being reviewed (ethics in this instance) and research. The chapter contained in the third edition of "Ethics in healthcare", alerts the reader to specific research ethics and ethical issues. Research in healthcare is posited as a moral activity – of attaining what is good and what is right. The aim of academic research might be incongruent with this notion and the authors emphasise the role of supervisors in this regard. Brain teaser ethical issues relating to the research process, are briefly alluded to and ethical issues relating

to research respondents/participants, institutions (including the importance of Ethics Committees) and the scientific integrity of the researcher are also addressed.

Healthcare ethics, as a field of empirical research, both within the qualitative and the quantitative research paradigm, is lying vacant. From a research point of view, this vacancy provides a rich area of well-deserved research taking into consideration the current public opinion of healthcare in South Africa and the apparent low morale of healthcare practitioners. In addition to the critical thinking exercises at the end of all chapters, I would personally like to see a section on possible research into the field of ethics covered by any particular chapter. For instance, research into the ethical moral aspects surrounding HIV/AIDS would be a welcome breather in an otherwise, largely stagnant and repetitive area of academic research.

I would also look forward to future editions of this text that would:

- expand the notion of teaching as moral activity into a complete chapter separate from a chapter on teaching ethics;
- focus even more pertinently on the healthcare practitioner, with all pertinent reference to “the nurse” removed; and
- address environmental ethics with emphasis on the immediate practice environment towards which the practitioner has a professional, moral ethical and virtuous obligation.

The third edition of *Ethics in healthcare* is a good reference for all healthcare practitioners. Its scope, width and depth are not obsessive and would thus provide information to a wide range of healthcare practitioners. The page layout of this volume is aesthetically pleasing, clean and relaxing to the eye. All in all, this book is a must have for the discerning healthcare practitioner. The revisers of the 3rd edition of “*Ethics in healthcare*” have carried forth an excellent concept of ethics in healthcare.