2.1: Legal and Ethical Introduction

Learning Objectives

- Identify drug administration guidelines within the State Nurse Practice Act
- Identify nursing responsibilities to prevent and respond to medication errors
- Identify nursing responsibilities associated with controlled substances
- Identify ethical responsibilities as they relate to medication errors
- Explain how nursing response reflects respect for a patient’s rights and responsibilities with drug therapy
- Outline nursing actions within the scope of nursing practice as they relate to the administration of medication
- Demonstrate patient-centered care during medication administration by respecting a patient’s gender and psychosocial and cultural needs
- Identify nursing responsibilities associated with safe medication administration
- Identify nursing responsibilities associated with patient medication education

Medication administration is an essential task nurses perform while providing patient care. However, safe medication administration is more than just a nursing task; it is a process involving several members of the health care team, as well as legal, ethical, social, and cultural issues. The primary focus of effective medication administration by all health professionals is patient safety. Although many measures have been put into place over the past few decades to promote improved patient safety, medication errors, and adverse effects continue to be a common event. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates, “Unsafe medication practices and medication errors are a leading cause of injury and avoidable harm in health care systems across the world. Globally, the cost associated with medication errors has been estimated at $42 billion USD annually.” [1] This chapter will examine the legal and ethical foundations of medication administration by nurses, as well as the practice standards and cultural and social issues that must be considered to
ensure safe and effective administration of medication.