10.2: Integrating Ethics into Nurse Leadership

It is the nurse leader’s responsibility to integrate professional guidelines (e.g., CNA Code of Ethics) with the ethics of their health care organization (e.g., mission, vision, values) in order to offer ethical guidance to care providers. Simultaneously, the nurse leader is required to critically analyze situations and take appropriate action with regards to practices that may threaten a patient’s health and safety. Nurse leaders model the just and caring behaviors that promote the common good for care recipients as well as students, nursing colleagues, and other health care providers. The following quote stresses the link between ethics and patients: “The ultimate goal of nursing ethics is to promote the wellbeing of patients through the delivery of good nursing care” (Johnstone, 2017, p. 19). Ethical nursing care and good nursing care are, by definition, similar terms that describe the actions required to achieve quality health care outcomes.

Recent research conducted in Australia investigated the ethical principles that guide the leadership practices of clinical nurse leaders (Mannix, Wilkes, & Daly, 2015). This research revealed three main principles that shape day-to-day clinical practices. These principles are relevant for nurses and nursing practice around the world. The principles discussed in the research are:

1. Nurses remain true to their beliefs, by embodying principled practice;
2. Nurses recognize that not all practices fit every patient, offering ethical leadership in ambiguous situations;
3. Nurses are open to people’s concerns and provide fair and just solutions. (Mannix et al., p. 1605)

These principles convey a sense of pride in nursing practice, a willingness to advocate for practices that meet the needs of patients, and an understanding of how to facilitate change by listening to people and empowering them to engage in change. Nurse leaders, by virtue of their Code of Ethics and the ethical principles that shape their daily practice, are obliged to advocate on behalf of their professional colleagues and the general public for healthy living conditions within healthy communities.