Ethical Considerations

In healthcare, workers may experience individual scenarios where their ethical beliefs and personal morals are in disagreement with the care provision to patients. It is, therefore, difficult to know whether healthcare workers have the right to conscientiously refuse to provide care as this depends on weighing professional duties against personal rights. For instance, a nurse may decline to assist in an abortion based on personal values, which could lead to moral conflicts if patient care is at risk.

To explore this issue, the four ethical principles of healthcare -autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice- can be applied. Autonomy focuses on the rights of the patient to make informed decisions about their care. In this case, respect for the autonomy of the patient is vital (Varkey, 2021) Beneficence requires that healthcare workers act in the best interest of patients, offering care that improves their conditions. While the nurse may not agree, they must guarantee that the patient receives the necessary care, either by referring them or by consulting another healthcare professional. Non-maleficence, defined as "do not harm," urges healthcare providers to avoid causing any form of harm through their actions. Refusing care could potentially harm the patient by preventing them from receiving the necessary services promptly (American Nurses Association, 2015). Lastly, justice is focused on fairness, ensuring every patient has equal access to care. When a healthcare worker refuses care based on personal beliefs, it can result in inequitable care.

The way these ethical principles are applied can vary depending on the healthcare profession. For instance, a physician may have greater autonomy in making decisions

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compared to a nurse, but both must ensure they find alternative solutions, such as referring patients to another provider, to avoid disrupting the patient's access to care.

References

American Nurses Association. (2022). Code of ethics for nurses with interpretive statements. 2015.

Varkey, B. (2021). Principles of clinical ethics and their application to practice. Medical Principles and Practice, 30(1), 17-28.

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