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Research Article

**TRUTH TELLING ETHICAL DILEMMA IN PALLIATIVE
CARE SETTING**Sumira Keran¹, Sana Sehar², Muhammad Afzal³, Dr. Syed Amir Gilani⁴¹BSN (student), sumiramazen@yahoo.com, ²Assistant Prof at LSN (UOL), sana.sehar@lsn.uol.edu.pk, ³Prof at LSN (UOL), Muhammad.afzal@lsn.uol.edu.pk, ⁴(Dean: Faculty of Allied Health Sciences)**Article Received:** October 2019 **Accepted:** November 2019 **Published:** December 2019**Background:**

This work is based on truth telling ethical dilemma which is the part of assignment on Leadership and Management process. Truth telling is professional code of ethics in Pakistan nursing council. This is the need of modern age to tell the truth to the patients who are in dying phase or terminal stage of life due to any life threatening or progressive disease. Key ethical principles of nursing must use in practice.

Methods: *Select the clinical scenario in which ethical dilemma exists. Literature review was done of selected problem, in order to complete this assignment. Describe the scenario; give the literature review of the problem. Used decision making process and problem solving management seven steps to resolve the problem.*

Result: *when nurses faced ethical dilemma:*

- 1- Put the case in ethic committee for review and to get their expert opinion after their consultation
- 2- Refer the case hospice team
- 3- Review extensive educational resources and latest researches
- 4- There is need to consult other health care experts.

Conclusion: *Telling the truth about disease and its prognosis and change of code status to terminally ill patient is a difficult process and a big dilemma that nurses has to face on daily basis. Nurses always play a vital role in patient treatment and care. That's why they must be committed to provide proper and truthful information to patient, to maintain trust between patient, family and nurses, in this way nurses help the patient and their families to go through this difficult time.*

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CASE SCENARIO:

During my clinical rotation as specialist palliative care and pain management nurse in palliative care units and outpatient clinics, there are so many occasions facing the difficult situation as a health care professional. Once I had experience of dealing with the patient who was 60year old man. Diagnosed case of Gastric carcinoma and metastasize to liver. He was married and his wife and siblings were very caring and loving for him. He was admitted in by palliative care physician in palliative care unit for receiving End of Life Care. The general condition of patient was very poor as he was bed bounded, remains drowsy but responds well on verbal command. He was oxygen dependent for the last one month.

There was generalized swelling on his body, unable to drink, eat, communicate or express his wishes. His urine output was decreased to normal level. PEG tube was intact to his body for feeding purpose. Body was oozing a serum due to generalized swelling on the body. There were death rattles with his breathing pattern. There is need to change the code status of the patient from resuscitate to do not resuscitate and withholding the nutrition either in form of Intravenous drips or feeding through tube. His recent scan and work up showed that disease is progressing and metastasize to peritoneum and bones too. Here is a picture of truth telling ethical dilemma. Immediate family was refusing to disclose this information to the patient. They were not ready to:

- 1- Inform the patient about disease is further metastasized to body parts.
- 2- Discuss about change his code status from resuscitate to do not resuscitate

INTRODUCTION:

According to National Cancer of Institute cancer is a cluster of disease in which abnormal cells growth very rapidly without any control and they invade on nearby body parts. They have tendency to move from one part of the body to other through blood and lymphatic system.

It is complicated illness, which for many years and in many cultures was perceived as incurable. It was considered that cancer means death and there was a tendency to hide the diagnosis from the patient by the family members and health care worker. This situation has changed, currently health professionals generally prefer to inform cancer patients about their illness.

Professional code of ethics of Pakistan Nursing Council describes that ethics is a philosophical self-

control that studies very carefully and scientifically what should be our behavior with ourselves, our colleagues and in our atmosphere of work area and to what is criteria of identifying between correct or good. Ethics explains about entire life that consists of our ethical responsibilities as persons, as residents of Pakistan and as a health care professional. (Mason,D.J and Leavitt, J.K 1998).

Lindberg, J.B et al (1994) said that Ethics is a self-control that consists of correct or wrong, moral responsibility, commitment and principles. It also deals with public, rules regulations and administrative philosophy values and beliefs. The word ethics demands very extraordinary principles of moral excellence while working in health care setting. In nursing as well as in medicine, accepted practice values should be continuing in one self and among the colleagues.

DISCUSSION:

Ethical dilemmas are the conditions/situations where responsible one has two choose between two options, and neither of one can resolve the condition in ethically approved way.

While practicing nursing in palliative care setting there are most of the instances where an ethical problem can be originate, there is insightful moral question that what is "correct" or "wrong" in professional decision making and giving care to the terminally ill patients. Zydziunaite V, Suominen T, Åstedt-Kurki P & Lepaite D (2010).

In standardized health care settings, it was the expectation from a nurse that despite of all ethical challenges they deliver care to the patients by respecting patient's wishes and cause no harm to others and provide care to patients of all age groups following the ethical principles. Burkhardt M & Nathaniel A (2013).

In above mention scenario, this is ethical dilemma that either to tell the patient about new metastatic disease and discuss the code status of the patient from resuscitate status to not resuscitate status. This is the right of the patient to have clear information about his disease from his health care provider and after that he decides to sign the consent form for resuscitate or do not resuscitate. This paper is a legal paper and has ethical concerns in it. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation is a aggressive treatment modality. Patients who are on palliative care and in dying phase are not supposed to get this treatment. The reason behind is that they are unable to get benefit from this procedure. There is

no any survival rate on dying patients with advance metastatic disease of cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

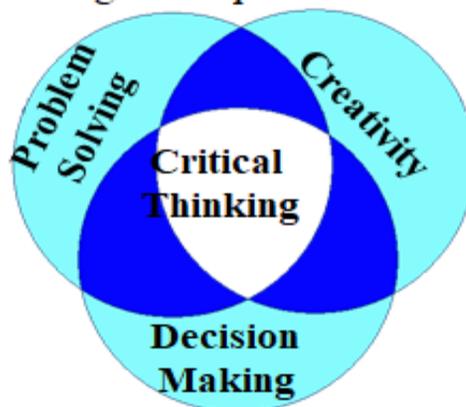
Mentzelopoulos SD, Bossaert L, Raffay V, et al. (2016). So this is very true that patient is in critical stage of his life. Family is also suffering and they wanted to have qualitative life of their beloved one. To achieving this goal, they are trying to intervene in medical decisions.

According to Gardiner (2003) all the Ethical principles should influence one's choice. In this case leadership and management process is decision making. The patient's family has suspected that after knowing the prognosis and having discussion on change of code status and further treatment role will be change to comfort care only, he will be emotional or psychologically, spiritually, physically drain and will not be able to co-op with the treatment, so they want to keep the prognosis from him.



Critical Thinking

Is a higher level cognitive process that includes:



Critical-Thinking Model Fig:1

Professionally in decision making, nurse should always stand by the hospital's policies and permit their patient to have access to all the medical information comprising their prognosis, treatment options and its outcome. Irrespective if it is bad. In this case the nurse could have made a decision from the code of Ethics by honoring the patient's autonomy.

As per The American Nurses Association, "The nurse provides services with respect for human dignity and the uniqueness of the client, unrestricted by considerations of social or economic status, personal attributes or the nature of the health problem" (ANA, 2001, p.1) in this case to respect the patient's choice and dignity, correct and complete information should

be delivered to the patient in an effort to justify his rights, while valuing his wishes at the same time. Should they leave their patient in the dark by not telling him truth? If we tell the patient truth, they can plan their important works according to their condition.

There is no doubt that the diagnosis of a life-threatening disease such as cancer is devastating for patients, and informing such a patient of the diagnosis has been describe as dropping a bomb. Health care professionals are the once who have to carry out the task of providing information to patients about their diagnosis and prognosis and further treatment modalities.



Rational Decision making process Fig: 2

Rational decision making is a process of different steps which help in making selections among different options. Logical thinking, objectivity, independence and study over subjectivity and insight are the main components of the process of rational decision making.

A successful relationship between patient and health care providers depends in the establishment of trust, which is strongly connected with truthful communication. On that basis, truth telling is considered to be an ethical issue as well as a moral obligation by a large number of health care providers.

Similarly, patients expect that their health care providers will tell them the truth, just as health care providers expect that their patients will tell them the

truth. Therefore, the disclosure of the truth aids the whole process of establishing an optimum patient-carer relationship.

Another purpose of information giving is to reduce uncertainty and to provide a basis for action. It enables patients to make informed choices about their own health care and plan for their future. It prevents harm, as patients who are not informed about their situation may fail to get the medical support that they need. Engaging patients in their care and securing their collaboration, leading to patients' adherence to the therapeutic or palliative schemes.

On the other hand, when disclosing the truth, there is always the risk of shattering a patient's hopes and dreams.

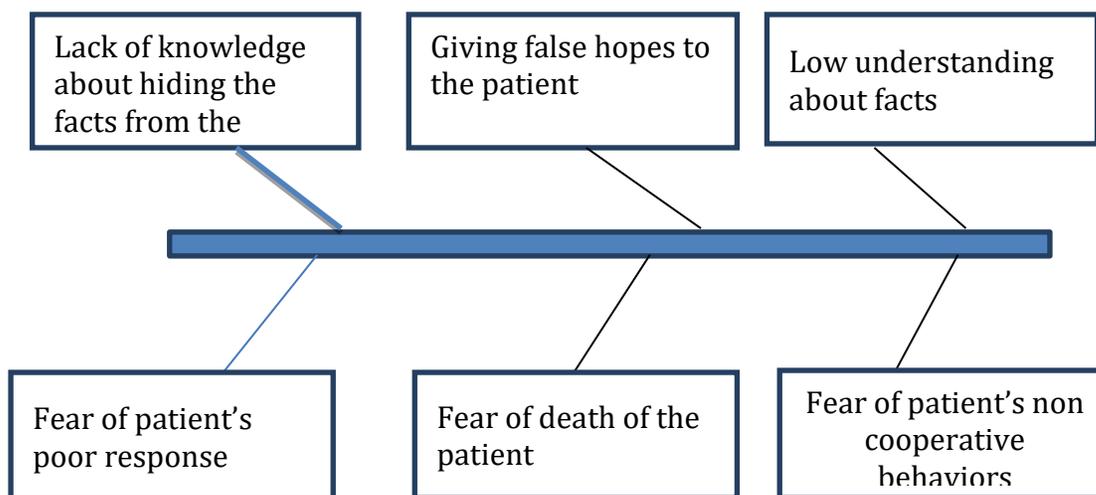


Fig:3

This fish bone diagram illustrate that there are so many causes of hiding disease progression and future treatment modalities by the family to the patient.

It was stated by Wang et al. (2004) that professionals should not think on this that “either they inform to patient or not,” essential is to keep in mind “whether the nature of cancer suffering person is suitable for informing or not to inform him.” Meyza J. Being (1997) the attending nurses of such patient, it is difficult to give good care to such patients who have no any truly informed of their diagnosis. If patient wanted to know about his diagnosis, then all treatment should be continue properly with his consent. Telling the truth is all depends on good communication skills and trust relationship. Nurse purposefully keep a good balance in the beneficence with the principle of autonomy in her nursing practice.

Alternate way to find the solution by Cheon, J., Coyle, N., Wiegand, D. L., & Welsh, S. (2015) when nurses faced ethical dilemma can be:

- 1- Put the case in ethic committee for review and to get their expert opinion after their consultation
- 2- Refer the case hospice team
- 3- Review extensive educational resources and latest researches
- 4- There is need to consult other health care experts and the priesthood

As the alternative plan was implemented, there is need to know that everyone in the team of healthcare providers, immediate family and patient are well informed about what is happening. The case is referring for other expert opinion and they have meeting with family and the patient individually and then together. They end up with the goal that patient should be DNR and have all the information

regarding his disease that's the point we want to achieve. So that results and effects of implementation can be monitored closely.

CONCLUSION:

Telling the truth about disease and its prognosis and change of code status to terminally ill patient is a difficult process and a big dilemma that nurses has to face on daily basis. Nurses always play a vital role in patient treatment and care. That's why they must be committed to provide proper and truthful information to patient, to maintain trust between patient, family and nurses, in this way nurses help the patient and their families to go through this difficult time.

In this case if patient knew that he is in the process to die, he could set his priorities and could spend quality of time with his family and say good bye to everyone to the family members but if nurse does not tell the truth to patient, patient's life can be miserable as he can always be depressed because of his terminally ill signs and symptoms and prolong his suffering like, to stay alone, isolation form the family and co-operation to the disease.

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