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ETHICS OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS ACTING AS ASSISTING PROFESSION REPRESENTATIVES IN A MODERN SOCIETY

Summary. A healthcare worker is one of the most typical representatives of the so-called assisting professions, whose common objective is any form of assistance to individuals dependent on the provision of care by others. In this post, the author points to the fact that healthcare workers are confronted with the aforementioned phenomena on a daily basis. It lays stress on respect for the patient's dignity at all times, and also provides guidance on the implementation of ethics in interaction between the healthcare workers and patients, because no human care would have been provided without this phenomenon.

Keywords: ethics, healthcare worker, patient, modern society, care.

ETYKA PRACOWNIKÓW OPIEKI ZDROWOTNEJ DZIAŁAJĄCYCH JAKO PRZEDSTAWICIELE ZAWODÓW WSPOMAGAJĄCYCH W NOWOCZESNYM SPOŁECZEŃSTWIE

Streszczenie. Pracownik opieki zdrowotnej jest jednym z najbardziej typowych przedstawicieli tak zwanych zawodów wspomagających, których wspólnym celem jest każda forma pomocy osobom zależnym od świadczenia opieki przez innych. W artykule tym autorka wskazuje na fakt, że pracownicy służby zdrowia mają do czynienia z takimi zjawiskami na co dzień. To kładzie nacisk na poszanowanie godności pacjenta w każdym czasie, a także dostarcza wskazówek na temat wdrożenia etyki w interakcji między pracownikami służby zdrowia a pacjentami, ponieważ bez tego zjawiska opieką nie zostałyby objęty żaden człowiek.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka, pracownik opieki zdrowotnej, pacjent, nowoczesne społeczeństwo.

Introduction

The term "Change" stands for a dynamic phenomenon which helps develop humanity. It is a means by which people mature physically and mentally. The change has been the society's development driving force, i.e. the integral part of the health service and it determines the processes taking place therein.

After 2000, more and more nationals began to participate in decisions relating to the implementation of health care. The paternalistic relationship between the healthcare workers and patients, so typical of the previous period, has gradually been transformed into partnerships. Most individuals make every effort to actively approach protection of their health, while being interested in the most efficient health services, premium quality health care and require adequate human approach by healthcare workers, as representatives of assisting professions.

The health system has been located in the heart of the whole society's interest, particularly the recipients of health care - patients. The changes related to the transformation of the whole society determine the provision of care. The health service passes by the uneasy period of changes with more or less positive impact on a patient. Their common goal should be to improve the care of patients.

In modern society, the patient's role has also undergone a change from a traditional, more or less passive consumer to an active participant in their own health care. All this reflects in the quality of health care provided and motivates healthcare workers to be prepared to meet that demand not only by implementing skilled work, but also through full personal involvement in the profession and adequate ethical approach to the sick.

A modern and prosperous society has an interest in the relationship between the health care provider and the recipient based on a partnership, respect for human dignity, manifestation of respect for the value of human beings, respect for equality and justice also in terms of implementation and protection of the rights of patients.

Human health care has just been one of the characteristic features of quality health care in the modern society, under which we could not only imagine medical or nursing interventions provided in a strict way, but especially the ability of adequate communication, empathic perception of a sick and suffering human and comprehensive efforts to tackle his/her problems.

Assisting professions

Caring for a man stands at the heart of the efforts by the so-called assisting professions, with a key position of medical staff profession. In particular, assisting means giving not only through providing technical assistance, but above all to help the suffering human being in

terms of adequate communication, encouragement and delivery of hope even in seemingly hopeless situations so frequent at the time of disease. The assisting professions have been typical for altruism or selflessness. An inward-looking human not reflecting the needs and concerns in his aid-dependant individuals may not become an actual representative (Rapčíková, 2014, p. 80).

The assisting professions have been characteristic for any form of assistance to all those in need of care and dependent upon it by others, as one of its most characteristic features of the medical staff profession. There have been a lot of such individuals in a contemporary society with the absence of social equality.

The assisting professions are very respectful and responsible, since they require staff having considerable expertise; however, they require people capable of empathy, social feeling, full of motivation for this work at the same time. To work with people within the assisting professions, a full understanding and acceptance of professional and philosophical ethics has been the must, whereas some workers are also motivated by theological ethics. The assisting professions ethics is based on knowledge, particular help to others and we strive for welfare of others instead of that of our own (Dolista, 2010, p. 1).

Respect and protection of the medical ethics principles should be a typical feature of the representatives of assisting professions and a prerequisite for the existence of human health service and its practical application in everyday life.

However, moral maturity of health workers lies not only in the knowledge of the relevant ethical principles and codes peculiar to the representatives of the so-called assisting professions. Moral maturity should have been linked with the effort of every human to transcend selfishness and to act in accordance with hi/her conscience.

Vadíková (In: Fobelová, 2011, p. 120) also considers it essential to apply specific ethics of consciousness as a malleable trait of personal identity for proper professional profiling, provided that the integrity of a person in the decision-making process and stable basis for tackling moral dilemmas have been maintained. This has been doubly true for the representatives within the assisting professions.

Health service in a modern society

In the light of the changes within the society after 1989, we see continued efforts to restore the spiritual dimension of social life and the humanization of interpersonal relations. This has particularly been reflected in the areas of labour related to the care of people. The holistic approach to human undergoes manifestation, as one of the most important attributes in implementing ethics within the health service.

Vadíková (In: Fobelová, 2011, p. 117) states that in every society and also that being proud for the attribute as a modern one, ethics application is not only reasonable but also autonomous, dignified and wise decision of a person. This fact has an indisputable importance for the exercise of a profession in each sector, every time and in every social system, but it resonates with even more challenge in the work of healthcare workers. This has also been due to the fact that life and health are values, the importance of which is incalculable and adequate approach to patients is an integral part of these values even in today's modern world. Health care should reflect the significant changes taking place and contributing to the society development via the change both in the relevant health legislation and the educational process related to the preparation of future health professionals, as well as changing philosophy of providing health care in the diverse types of medical centres.

The features of the modern society which affect the provision of health care and interaction of healthcare workers and patients most intensively include as follows:

- a) holistic view of a human;
- b) dynamics closely linked to computerization and scientific and technological development;
- c) increasing educational level of the population;
- d) plurality of opinion as a result of the respecting the autonomy principle;
- e) complicated interpersonal relationships which determine the necessity of mutual tolerance;
- f) not only origin, but also justified enforcing of various individual's rights.

Social progress and the aforementioned factors significantly determine the diagnostic, therapeutic and preventive processes throughout the health sector, which, because of its focus on the life and health, is one of the most sensitive social sectors. On the other hand, it is understandable that any problems in the health sector resonate with considerable intensity within the society and leave immune neither providers nor recipients of health care.

Holistic perception of a human

The disease is the source of a new situation in the individual and adaptation is often very difficult for a patient. An adequate approach to the patient in a special life situation by healthcare workers contributes to faster adaptation to illness and hospital environment. Understanding the sick person as a whole, i.e. in a holistic way, has an irreplaceable role in work of health care workers. They should make every effort to understand and accept the patient comprehensively - holistically as a bio-psycho-social-spiritual unity.

A holistic approach to patients is an essential attribute of their work and quite often it is the key not only to the detection, but also to solution of their problems. This represents a

significant factor in the development and growth of self-confidence and self-esteem of patients and can be implemented under diverse conditions and in every circumstance.

Placing emphasis on such issues brings a huge change in the philosophy of healthcare in order to deliver a deep human dimension. Active search and meeting the needs of patients constitutes a practical implementation of ethical principles in medicine and nursing, including fulfilment of patients' rights to comprehensive and quality health care.

Ethics and computerization of health

Scientific and technological development determines each sector within the society, the health sector not excluding. At present, we cannot imagine almost any advanced specialist medical intervention without modern diagnostic and therapeutic approaches, not to mention that furnishing the medical centres with modern instrumentation and computer technologies has been the mark of both their professional as well as social status. Scientific progress is a strong motivating factor stimulating healthcare workers to lifelong learning in accordance with the requirements of the so-called evidence-based medicine. .

The instrumentation and computer technology also enters into the interpersonal relationships among healthcare workers and patients, often to the extent that the patient ceases to be an active participant and only remains a passive object of targeted diagnostics and therapy. The mentioned fact is a feature of depersonalization - although one of the fairly typical, but on the other hand, the high-risk factors within the interaction of healthcare worker with the patient.

In the context of the increasingly modern technical potential enabling minimally invasive and robot-controlled surgery and application of different laser and other types of surgeries, it may be that a physician and other members of the healthcare team do not focus on the patient, who should be the centre of their efforts, instead of they focusing on the technology. Healthcare workers communicate about the patient, but not with the patient...

As pointed out by Glasa (2009, p. 14) „a healthcare worker must not lose sight of the patient, his individuality, dignity, legitimate interests, respect for the rights, identity, integrity and true welfare of a whole person, who entrusted to his/her care. These ethical principles need to be respected even in the development, implementation and management of public health programmes and other activities in the field of healthcare."

The commercialization interfering into the environment of medical centres is typical for today's modern society. As a result, some of its practices also bring about doubts and worrying situations exemplified in the purchase of overpriced medical instrumentation and non-transparent allocation of funds.

The ethical problem associated with technological progress in healthcare sector may also prefer certain individuals waiting for diverse medical interventions to be implemented at the

expense of the so-called "socially disadvantaged" individuals. Healthcare workers managing the patient waiting lists shall realize that every citizen has equal right to access to diagnostic and therapeutic procedures in terms of the latest products of scientific and technical progress under the act. Insisting on these issues is an effective means to prevent health service from dehumanisation and holistic perception of a patient.

The patient's informed consent in writing (positive declaration) shall be obtained before any procedure in connection with the development of modern diagnostic and therapeutic methods. An accepted, informative and qualified patient's consent with the relevant procedures for its further diagnosis and treatment is concerned. On the other hand, every patient has the right to refuse diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, and shall be informed about the consequences of their decisions. The written form of rejection is called a negative declaration (Rapčíková, 2014, pp. 42-43).

Educational level and pluralism of opinion

The right to freely express an opinion is one of the fundamental rights of every human guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. The above mentioned right has also justified its presence in the healthcare environment. The relationship where a physician, nurse or other healthcare worker and patient have equal status has gradually been eliminated by paternalism, so typical for health service the past decades. The partnership between the health care provider and beneficiary is a natural result of recently superiority of medical staff over a patient and demonstrates the ability to communicate and perceive a patient, as required by modern time.

An increasing educational level in population - real and potential patients - has been a characteristic feature of the contemporary society. Consequently, many patients have largely been knowledgeable in the art of health service, i. e. diagnostics and therapy. An educated and informed patient is not only capable of initiating changes in health service, but these aspects are also a prerequisite for motivating the patients to a responsible approach to their own health.

At present, the patient's submissive status continues to transform for several decades. The majority of patients does not only accept a role of passive recipients of health care, but eager to take over responsibility for their own health and life, to work together with physicians and other healthcare workers and to take part in decision-making in open and honest conversations with healthcare workers.

The patient wishes to be informed and the right to information is a fundamental right of every human being. The education level determines the exchange of information between healthcare workers and patients. At present, the patient has unlimited possibilities in gaining

information, applied mainly by patients with secondary and university education. Healthcare workers must also react on that situation. This latter fact is a reason why the so-called merciful lie, so often referred to in the past, loses its merits, even if it can be considered ethically acceptable in specifically justified cases.

Awareness is the first condition for freedom of choice referred to as a minimum, i.e. the patient should have enough information from different sources. If there has been no minimum condition for freedom of choice, then there can be no moral choice. Formulation of free moral choice must include all the three necessary conditions - knowledgeable, non-violent and deliberate decision - the choice among several (at least three) options is concerned (Fobelová, In: Fobel, 2011, pp. 87-88).

The increasing education level not only refers to patients, but also to healthcare workers. The healthcare worker's profession requires lifelong learning, not only in specialist medical field but also in the ethical and psycho-social terms. The healthcare worker only becomes a true professional through continuous education aimed at acquiring knowledge and practical skills in line with the medical science progress and the formation of human pro-social behaviour to the sick.

The above mentioned facts also engage in interaction among healthcare workers and patients. Their beliefs and attitudes may include contradictory opinions on problem solving (ethical pluralism). As Glasa (2009, p. 4) states „the situation, in which two or more options of a contradictory procedure confront each other and for which seemingly equally legitimate but conflicting ethical (moral) arguments are offered at the same time, is called as an ethical (moral) dilemma." There have been a lot of such situations in medicine. For instance, specific medical fields, such as palliative medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology, neonatology, geriatrics, and more.

Patients' rights as a prerequisite of respecting the autonomy and human dignity

In the health sector, different changes take place and many of them become part of the reform healthcare legislation. The implementation and respect of patients' rights forms part of the health legislation, and a few years ago it appeared to be a problematic and received considerable concern by healthcare workers. At present, the patients' rights constitute a factor which should significantly affect the quality of healthcare, i.e. nursing care as well.

Under our conditions, the issue of patients' rights became current particularly in relation to the radical transformation started in 1989 and resulted in the changes in the political and social situation, as well as the origin of the Slovak Republic. The emergence of a sovereign

state and the efforts to integrate into the European Union deepened the interest of patients' rights in healthcare workers and public (Šebeková, 2001, pp. 7-8).

Therefore, Hegyi, Tóth (2001, p. 124) consider it important that a patient has rights allowing him/her to make decisions for themselves, while preserving their integrity. Respecting the rights of patients contributes to improvement of cooperation and relationship between healthcare workers and patients and increases the chances for patients to cure.

In the opinion of the authors (Godová, Ondrušová, 2008, p. 145), the individual rights of patients are based on the human right to human dignity, self-determination and autonomy in relation to health care. Human dignity refers to personal existence of a human and expresses ideas about the personal and social value of every human. Its assumption is to respect the uniqueness and unrepeatability of a human, as the person with the right to autonomy in the values and autonomous methods of implementation thereof.

It should be noted that the autonomy of each individual, i. e. a patient, is closely linked with responsibility, where the proportional relationship is concerned. That is, the greater autonomy the greater responsibility.

The dignity of patients forms an integral part of the Code of Healthcare Workers Conduct and European Charter of Medical Ethics, published in 2011. Each physician, nurse and other healthcare workers have a moral obligation to execute health care based on respect for the dignity of a patient.

Respect for the dignity of patients should be one of the most important aspects not only in medicine humanization but it shall also be a symbol of considerate and humane nursing care. Each physician, nurse, as well as all other members of the healthcare team have a moral obligation to treat and care for a patient with respect to his/her human dignity.

Respect for dignity is a key factor in nursing care and maintaining the dignity of patients is a one of the key factors of their curing. Respect for dignity in care for patients in developed countries is, but not limited to, focused on respect for physical intimacy, ensuring privacy in the area, providing sufficient time frame, emotional support to patients and care for patients as a whole. The attributes are key components of professional nursing care and there is evidence that compliance with these components contributes to faster convalescence of patients (Lin, 2010, p. 346).

Conclusion

There is no other place like the sickbed, where we can learn the art of listening, feel and sympathize, tolerate and respect, be interested in basic life values and needs and also appreciate life.

The patient's role has evolved and now the psychological approach in patients towards the hospital, as an institution, undergoes changes, and the patient is no longer a passive recipient of health care. The patient expects quality healthcare and his/her requirements for services provided in the hospital are also increasing. A patient gets into the position of a client and is more interested not only in the diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, but also in the possibility of prevention and healthy lifestyle (Bártlová, 2005).

Healthcare workers should realize that the society development initiates changes in the medical environment and healthcare workers need to be prepared to implement them when caring of the patient. Every patient should be given a hope having different forms. If the patient has no hope for a cure, he/she should feel comfortable sharing his/her suffering with medical staff who, as representatives of assisting professions, should consider the majesty of life and its quality to be the highest majesty.

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Omówienie

Artykuł koncentruje się na specyficznym sposobie, w jaki pracownicy opieki zdrowotnej podchodzą do pacjentów w ośrodkach medycznych, nieuchronnie zależnych od charakterystycznych cech współczesnego społeczeństwa, które obejmują automatyzację i informatyzację. Modernizacja aparatury jest nie tylko kluczowym elementem, ale w chwili obecnej koniecznością, która charakteryzuje również zaawansowaną służbę zdrowia i znacząco wpływa na opiekę zdrowotną nad pacjentami (klientami). To z kolei skutkuje tym, że pacjent jest często postrzegany w sposób całościowy, to znaczy jako istota biopsychospołeczna. Współczesne społeczeństwo cechuje dynamizm, pluralizm opinii, potrzeba tolerancji w stosunkach międzyludzkich, a nie tylko pochodzenie, ale także uzasadnione jest egzekwowanie praw. Nie mniej ważny jest fakt, że stale rośnie poziom wykształcenia w populacji.