Ethical leadership and decision making from the nursing service leaders' perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges and opportunities for implementing ethical leadership among nurse managers at Batangas Medical Center. Ethical leadership is crucial for promoting a positive work environment, employee satisfaction, and ultimately, enhancing patient care. The theoretical framework is grounded in Utilitarianism, emphasizing the pursuit of the greatest good for the greatest number and the centrality of equality in ethical decision-making. Purposive sampling and qualitative content analysis will be employed to assess barriers to ethical leadership in nursing. Fifteen nurse managers with a minimum of two years of managerial experience and a deep understanding of ethics will participate in the study. Data collection through semi-structured questionnaires and one-on-one interviews aims to achieve data saturation. Participants articulate ethical leadership as a principled approach prioritizing moral values, integrity, and ethical standards in guiding behavior and decisions. The study highlights ethical leaders extending beyond organizational goals to prioritize the well-being of team members, stakeholders, and the broader community, serving as exemplars of trust, empathy, and accountability. Introducing an ethical leadership model, the research emphasizes creating maximum societal value through a utilitarian perspective. Drawing from Bazerman's insights, the model encourages managers to overcome cognitive obstacles hindering ethical decision-making. Managers committed to generating value can shape organizational behavior by establishing norms and fostering an environment that prioritizes ethical considerations. In conclusion, this research aims to illuminate challenges and opportunities in ethical leadership within nursing, offering insights to improve the ethical climate in healthcare organizations, enhance patient care, and elevate employee satisfaction.

Keywords: ethical leadership, ethical environment, decision-making, utilitarianism, healthcare

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1. Introduction

Leadership is crucial in the sphere of professional nursing practice, and its important role in fostering motivation and effective performance helps nurses deliver high-quality care. Since the ethical leader may contribute to the development of an ethical environment, provide ethical guidance and services, and ensure that employees are satisfied with their jobs by putting morals and values first, ethics and ethical practices are a crucial part of leadership qualifications. However, there are various obstacles that impede nurse directors from implementing this kind of leadership, which directly impacts the production of their workforce. Despite the difficulties at work, health care companies are currently undergoing quick and necessary adjustments aimed at improving service quality, patient satisfaction, and productivity. "Cultural problems" encompass organizational and social culture; "managerial problems" are tied to organizational and staff-related problems; and "ethical problems" are related to ethical doubt, ethical conflicts, and ethical anguish. Nursing leaders realized several facets of the issues related to ethical leadership in the clinical setting, which is related to the ethical leadership issue. If the gap indicatively linked to organizational and staff-related concerns is not effectively addressed, it may result in ambiguity about ethical conduct, ethical conflicts, and ethical anguish; "cultural problems" include organizational and social culture; and "managerial problems" which are connected to organizational and staff-related issues. Alongside these changes, nurses must deal with issues such a high workload, which is common in government hospitals, a lot of patient awareness, a variety of staff skill-related issues, a lack of resources, poor job and life quality. However, there is a requirement that nurses treat patients ethically and prioritize ethics in all aspects of their work. Nurses are expected to follow a professional code of ethics to which they have pledged their allegiance on, that emphasizes their duty to respect, defend, and uphold the fundamental rights of those entrusted to their care.

As a result, nurses in formal leadership roles must promote ethics, which means they must practice ethical leadership, particularly in completing tasks in the best possible way, an approach that has attracted much attention in recent years. Through personal acts and interpersonal interactions, this leadership style encourages the development of suitable normal conduct. It also encourages the promotion of such behaviors in subordinates through bilateral discussions and the improvement of decision-making. The ability to integrate, discuss, and act upon ethics in daily activities will help to support the ethical competence of nurses. Ethical leaders must take more initiative to model and support ethical performance while also being aware of and sensitive to moral issues to enhance nurses' performance by fostering respect for human dignity. With the aforementioned information in mind, the researcher aims to ascertain Ethical Leadership and Decision-making from the standpoint of the nursing leaders of the nurse managers in the tertiary hospital in Batangas.

Objectives of the Study - The study aims to determine and explore Ethical Leadership and Decision-Making from the Nursing leaders' perspective of the nurse managers in tertiary hospital in Batangas province.

2. Methods

Research Design - Purposive sampling and traditional qualitative content analysis was used in the study to evaluate the issues and barriers to ethical leadership in nursing. In studies that are aimed to explain a phenomenon, conventional content analysis is typically the chosen approach. When there were few theories or little literature on the phenomenon under study, this design is appropriate. Given that the phenomena will be examined using a qualitative method, the hospital's daily environment and analytic evaluation from the standpoint of a quarterly audit will all be taken into consideration. Formal nursing leaders who were interested in participating in the study and had at least two years of managerial experience been chosen. The selection criteria for the nurses were leadership rank, participation in training in ethical management, and experience with a deep

understanding of ethics. These people were significant informants because they had extensive knowledge and experience in the topic under research and could contribute a wealth of information. Clinical leaders have ethical views that have developed and required the engagement of both learning and actual discipline as decision-makers in the healthcare system. We used data collection to reach data saturation.

Participants of the Study - The study utilized the responses from fifteen (15) nurse managers in tertiary hospital in Batangas.. Among the nursing leaders, those with at least two (2) years of managerial work experience who are willing to participate in the study will be chosen. The participants are Unit Managers in VLM area, Operating room, Annex area, and Emergency room. Another one is a Training Officer from a nursing service office. Furthermore, the others not mentioned are head nurses from Station 1 to Station 11. Selection criteria for the nurses included experience in extensive understanding in ethics, leadership status, and attended training in ethical management in the field of leadership and ethics. Convenience sampling is also used in whoever nurse leader is available at the time of the administration of the questionnaires. These individuals are likely to have wider knowledge and extensive experience related to the subject under study (they were key informants) and could provide much information. As decision-makers in the health care system, clinical leaders have the emergence of ideas on ethics that require the participation of both learning and actual discipline. Data saturation data collection will be employed.

Data Gathering Instrument - The researcher used a semi structured questionnaire that would lead to answering the main problem which would determine Ethical Leadership and Decision-Making from the Nursing leaders' perspective of the nurse managers in tertiary hospitals in Batangas. Supporting questions may be emanated to the course of discussion. A one and one conversation, face to face method of gathering procedure was employed.

Data Gathering Procedure - The researcher made a semi structured questionnaire that had been tested for validation. The questionnaire and a copy of the manuscript was submitted to LPU Ethics and Review Board for approval. After the approval was granted to the researcher, it then underwent Pilot testing. Recommendations and modifications were carried out depending if there were some issues refined. A written informed consent from the participants was then solicited to facilitate easy and non-contestable data gathering. The information gathered was collated and analyzed accordingly. A face-to-face interview took place so that necessary data was to be obtained to answer the main problem of the research. The interviews conducted took at least 15 minutes and 30 at most each. Follow-up interviews were not necessary during this procedure because the researcher was able to gather enough data and information, sequentially.

Ethical Considerations - The researcher applied and observed the Ethical standards in the conduct of research. Anonymity will be observed. Explanation to the respondents will be done cautiously. An informed consent will be taken, and the value of beneficence will be properly observed by LPU's ethics approval.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 First theme: Ethical Leadership Defined

The 18 participants in the study have explained that Ethical Leadership is defined as having a leader who inspires, influences, and motivates individuals with respect and sound leadership to reach the goal of the organization. Respondent 7 who is a general nurse also claimed that *"In leadership, Ethical Leaders follow the judicial way in giving direction for a common objective or goal"*. While Respondent #11 who is also a general nurse explained that *"The ethical leadership of the medical institution system safeguards the health of patients, employees, and the community around them within the moral conduct"*. Personally, ethical leadership involves placing moral principles, integrity, and values at the forefront when guiding the conduct, choices, and demeanor of those in leadership positions. Ethical leaders not only work towards accomplishing organizational objectives but also give precedence to the welfare of their team members, stakeholders, and the larger community. They

consistently maintain a robust ethical foundation and inspire others to follow suit, thereby cultivating an atmosphere characterized by trust, consideration, and responsibility.

The above statements were justified by the Definition by the American Nurses Association, 2022, that, An Ethical nurse leader is defined in accordance with the Role of Nursing Leaders based on their actions, and not s by a position of authority. Leaders in nursing inspire and influence others to achieve their maximum potential to reach the organizational goal. They used some critical nursing skills to make the followers to achieve and met the target as planned. Supported by the study of Guibert-Lacasa and Vázquez-Calatayud (2022), the systematic review on Hospital Nursing Ethical Leadership discussed further that leadership in Clinical Nursing shall have competencies that will give directions to the people in the organization with enthusiasm and motivation to achieve the goal of the organization reflected from the guidelines and good role modeling with sound morality in its' context.

Sub Themes: Interactive Ethical Leadership

Respondent #1 who is a known Senior Nurse in the Critical area, claimed that, *"For me, Ethical leadership in clinical setting is an important part of nursing core especially to patient's overall health. It is important that we keep nurse-patient interaction and allow patients to be part of every action we make"*. Also another given insights by 2 respondents, Respondents 2 and 8 verbalized that Ethical Leadership includes prioritizing the good health of the patient, staff and community as a whole. 17 out of twenty respondents further stated that *"Ethical leadership in Healthcare ensures the health of the patient, worker, and community health"*. Analyzing all the given insights, the researcher has seen and observed that the participants all agreed that it is significant for them in Ethical Leadership that the patient, staff and community shall be given due recognition being the elements of moral sound care regardless of whoever they are as long as they are a part of Health system.

Supported by the explanation extracted from Duquesne University, School of Nursing (2020), Ethical leaders shall inculcate to model and support ethical performance and at the same time be sensitive to moral issues and enhance nurse's performance by fostering respect for human dignity; thus, they can play an important role in promoting patient safety, increase the capacity to discuss and act upon ethics in daily basis. Also, In addition to understanding components of ethical decision-making, nurse leaders must be able to help staff nurses handle the implications that arise from poor ethical choices.

Subthemes: Ethical Leadership in Action

Three (3) participants out of twenty claimed that from what they have experienced, they need to ensure that the ethical values are aligned across the organization, promotion of communication, avoidance of bias, leading by example etc... Respondent 7 who is Senior Nurse at the Emergency Department cited that, *"According to my observations, they/we must guarantee that ethical ideals are shared throughout the business, as well as promote communication, eliminate prejudice, and lead by example"*. Also, *Respondent # 9, A unit head mentioned, "must ensure that ethical ideas are disseminated across the organization," while all the rest of the participants manifested a common idea that, Leaders, in their humble perspective, must ensure that ethical principles are propagated throughout the organization*, improve interpersonal interaction, reduce bias, and lead by example.

It is clearly understood by the researcher that Leading by example and elimination of prejudice are two distinct ways of dealing by the participants in dealing with Issues arising in their areas where Ethical leadership is applied. As such, the prevention of biases is also observed. As discussed by Gallagher et al., (2022) the principles to be considered in ethical leadership shall be honesty, justice, integrity, respect, and community. The traits dictate that an ethical leader must be a well-rounded individual, and these qualities help them deal with their positions and team members more fairly to create an all-inclusive work environment.

Subthemes: Congruent Conflict Resolution

Twenty (20) out of twenty participants all agreed that conflicts that erupted among the healthcare team members thus they give each party the opportunity to voice their issues, when necessary, promotion of

communication, avoidance of bias, leading by example etc. Collaborating can be the ideal form of constructive conflict resolution. Both parties involved in the conflict are committed to discussing the problem, evaluating solutions, and pinpointing the best conclusion for resolution. This supports trust, teamwork, and alignment with shared goals. Communication skills can be used for building up relationships rather than tearing them down with our, anger, words and actions. Effective communication requires; respect, grace, empathy, active listening for adding value to the person being heard. Judging the motives of others is another communication obstacle to be avoided. Allowing others to openly express themselves without being judged for whatever reason is a courtesy, giving the other person dignity with the freedom to be open.

Subthemes: Value Laden Leadership

From the point of view of Respondents, 3, 12 and 15, being the nurses assigned in the general ward in the hospital dispensing services in a constant manner to the patients, *"Respect the autonomy of the patients, significant others of the patients and the sound reliance to the capabilities of staff are the values base strategies we apply in handling the challenges in the application of Ethical Leadership in the ward"*. From the point of view of general nurses who responded to the current question, "Be fair to everyone and treat people equally." are their best option in observing the Ethical leadership performed in the clinical area. Also, the remaining 5 participants claimed that No harm harmed physically, emotionally, and psychologically the self-esteem of others, being true to self, keeping y promises and maintaining loyalty, so as being beneficial to others and trying to contribute to the general well-being of others. Are those the ways to handle the challenges while performing Ethical leadership?

Ethical leadership starts with an inner journey of integrity. Then the individual will discover his core values, develop a vision of how the world could be different, and find how he can express this vision in his personal voice. After completing this internal journey, the individual will move to an outer commitment which includes living and behaving in ways that serve the community and advance the common good. The ethical leaders will have to see as to how his values, vision and voice are keeping with the common good. Ethical leadership is cascading the ethical policies to the lower level. This is known as leadership from above. Some leaders sit astride the apex of the organizational hierarchy. These leaders have the authority, power and status to dictate ethical principles down the organization chart, and people have a basic duty to comply. In genuine and enthusiastic compliance, however, a nursing leader must live the ethics he/she manifests and applies. This may seem to be tough for a small run but once a leader is habitual of following this practice, he will be in a condition to build a culture that can survive in difficult situations.

Subthemes: Ethics Driven Decisions

All the respondents claimed that they have observed the rules of conduct and work with consideration of their full accountability over the issues affecting the usual operation and management of patients. As such, Respondents 5 and 18 who are both from general ward staff nurses discussed that *"From me, patient privacy, confidentiality is the rule of thumb, and because of it, I always take into consideration the tasks that will give benefits to all the patients and the stakeholder"*. However, Respondents 1, 2 and 3 who are assigned as Senior Nurses claimed that "due to Data Privacy Act we are careful in dealing with patients especially those who are in critical conditions, also control and management of privacy of patients are in full consideration. Also, mentioned were, "We as Leaders, leaders don't want to harm others. *For us, ethical leadership is nearly always about eliminating or reducing harm" All the rest also mentioned that stated that, we don't want toxic environment that we usually asked for Conflict Resolution in order to protect the interest of the patients, staff and the hospital"*.

The responses of the participants signify high regard for Ethical Leadership. The Clinical setting where the nurses work the act of accountability, provision of privacy, compliance with Data privacy Act, the value of beneficence and conflict resolution are among those Ethical issues handled and managed in the area. Supported by the study of Ghaenem and Kastelli, (2019), accountability and moral competence are two factors that may have a positive effect on ethical leadership in organizations. The obvious implications to organizational leaders of the

positive effects of accountability include reduced failures, enhanced social exchange, controlled spending, clear definitions of role which increased productivity, increased job satisfaction, enhanced justice, and employee retention. Additionally, the positive effects of moral competence include high ethical awareness, making moral decisions, increased performance, and increased organizational performance. Therefore, it improves organizations.

On the other note, Data Privacy Act aims to protect personal data in information and communications systems both in the government and the private sector, also, empowers individuals to maintain control over their personal information. It allows them to decide how their data is collected, used, and shared. By respecting individuals' autonomy, data privacy ensures that personal information is not exploited or misused without consent. Respecting data privacy is an ethical responsibility. Organizations that handle data must ensure they have proper consent for data collection, use, and sharing. By adhering to ethical data practices, show their commitment to respecting individuals' rights and promoting tr Data privacy is crucial for establishing trust between individuals and organizations. When companies prioritize data privacy and demonstrate their commitment to protecting personal information, they build a reputation for reliability and integrity. This, in turn, fosters customer confidence, leading to stronger relationships and long-term loyalty. Transparency in their operations.

Beneficence as defined is the ethical principle of doing good or acting in the best interest of the patient. This principle is often applied to healthcare decision-making, and it requires healthcare professionals to consider the potential risks and benefits of any course of treatment before proceeding. This includes the following circumstances, this principle is often applied to healthcare decision-making, and it requires healthcare professionals to consider the potential risks and benefits of any course of treatment before proceeding. In the context of telehealth, beneficence may require clinicians to weigh the risks and benefits of providing care via technology, such as video conferencing, versus in-person (Kinsinger, 2019).

In Ethical leadership, nurse managers must learn how to positively engage in conflict resolution and stay engaged to promote collaboration and effective care. Being successful includes dialogue, coaching, the identification of the potential conflict, education, and training. No harm harmed physically, emotionally and psychologically the self-esteem of others, Being true to self, keeping y promises and maintaining loyalty, so as being beneficial to others and trying to contribute to the general well-being of others. Are those the ways to handle the challenges while performing Ethical leadership. As said, all approaches to conflict can be appropriate for specific situations, but they can also be inappropriate or overused. When conflict occurs, take time to consider which approach is most beneficial for the situation. Keep in mind that using wrong approaches can escalate conflict, damage relationships, and reduce your ability to effectively meet team goals. Correct conflict management approaches build trust in relationships, accomplish goals, and de-escalate conflict (Wagner, 2022).

3.2 Second Theme: Ethical Consciousness Leadership

In the performance of Ethical Leadership, affecting the performance of the Nursing Leaders, affecting relationship and performance in relation to Nurse patient interaction, Respondents 1 to 20, claimed that *"When conducting ethical leadership, you must be mindful of how you interact and work with nurses and patients. You must empathize and sympathize with every contact"*. *"Though, for nurse-patient interaction, some of the participants said that, "You must be cognizant of how you engage and work with nurses and patients while exercising ethical leadership. According to our findings, everyone should be able to relate and sympathize with every contact"* and for the relationship and performance of duty, *"R2- Nurses or any medical staff in the clinical setting must be committed, empowered, and always doing their best because it greatly affects your relationship with them and your ethical leadership towards them like how I experienced"*. And in relation to performance of duty, *" R3- conflicts that erupted among the healthcare team members. They give each party the opportunity to voice their issues, when necessary"*, *"R4- You must be sensitive when performing ethical leadership in terms of how you communicate and collaborate with nurse and patients. You need to empathize and sympathize every interaction being done because from what I experienced this is what I think. and R5- You must be sensitive when*

performing ethical leadership in terms of how you communicate and collaborate with nurse and patients. You need to empathize and sympathize every interaction being done because from what I experienced this is what I think".

The answers brought into the highlight of Communication however, empathy and sympathy are considered as their strong points to maintain good nurse -patient interaction and performance of their ethical leadership. Leaders who sympathize can feel a sense of care for someone going through a difficult time. Sympathetic leaders might even show that support by donating to a cause or sharing information on social media. Leaders who empathize, however, demonstrate the ability to identify and share in the feeling's others experience. Leaders who empathize, however, demonstrate the ability to identify and share in the feeling's others experience. In other words, empathy is sympathy internalized, making leaders not only more self-aware but more thoughtful and strategic approaches (Karah, 2023).

*It's important to note, as always, that no one gets these things perfect every time. It's not about perfection over all else, it's about being mindful and committing to trying your hardest. Communication is something all living creatures do whether through written word, spoken language, sign language, or any other means. No matter how you manage to share information with others, the best leaders I've had are aware of a few universal basics. Because leadership is manifested through the communication and interaction a leader and group engage in, the personality of the leader will significantly impact the interactions of the entire group. It will affect how other group members relate to the leader, their willingness to interact with the leader, the effectiveness of group communication, and satisfaction of group members. As noted earlier, leaders have the opportunity to cultivate their relationships with group members and can communicate and interact with others to create relationships that are either strong or weak. Ethical leaders cultivate strong relationships with group members that are characterized by support, trust, and understanding in strong relationships versus weak relationships. This holds implications for the ethical behavior of leaders, but also demonstrates how leaders can encourage ethical behavior from subordinates by engaging them in strong relationships (Kim et al., 2022).

The experiences of the applicants were discussed as: Some of the respondents said that, *"Working under ethically sound leadership developed me and gave me the confidence to face more inescapable challenges, also, Performing beneath morally good leadership shaped me and given me the strength to confront new and unavoidable obstacles and functioning under ethically sound leadership developed me and gave me the courage to face new and unavoidable challenges, are their common experiences".* But all agreed that working behind responsible management has shaped me and given me the confidence to confront new and unavoidable problems. As such, *"R1- The experience of having good ethical leadership boosted my morale and helped me improve and helped me deal confidently on more inevitable situations while R2- The experience of working under morally sound leadership improved me and gave me the confidence to deal with more inescapable situations. Also, R3- Nurses or any medical staff in the clinical setting has to be committed, empowered and always doing their best because it greatly affects your relationship with them and your ethical leadership towards them like how I experienced however, R5- The experience of working under morally sound leadership improved me and gave me the confidence to deal with more inescapable situations".*

All responses were positively claimed to have them experienced being more responsible, strong and upheld individuals by manifesting within themselves the confidence and increased their morale. From a collective perspective, leaders can inspire those around them to behave ethically. By setting an example and giving the direction for ethical behavior, others will observe and act similarly. In this way, ethical leaders can positively influence many others, presenting them with a set of actions that they can adopt for the greater good. On a personal level, being an ethical leader is essential for credibility and reputation. van Villet et al., (2022) strongly emphasis on values and ethics creates a positive work environment that fosters an overall better mood and a higher understanding among individuals. When the roots are solid, the stress and tensions of daily business are like the wind on a stable tree. People usually feel the roots and know if they can rely on them and feel confident, or if they will have to keep their guard up.

3.3 Transformative Actions for the Betterment

The majority of the respondents claimed the essential creation and implementation of the Committee which shall work and keep a close monitoring on the application of Ethical Leadership thus an Ethics and Grievance Committee may enhance the implementation, of more ethical activities that would promote respect, honesty, integrity, value base services and ethical organization.
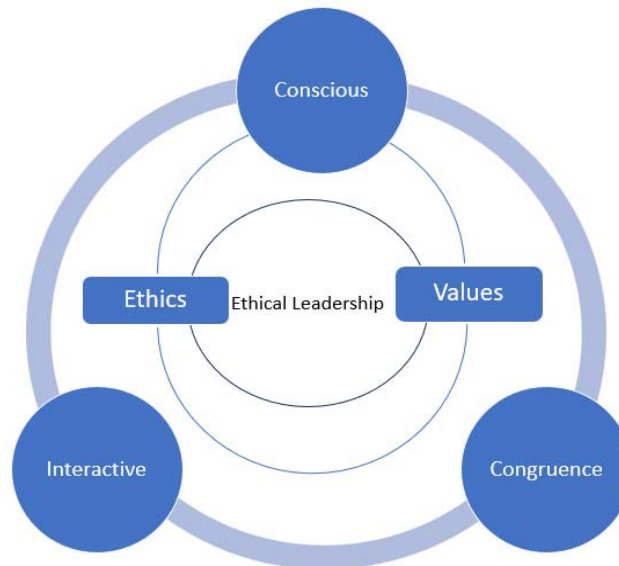
My approach to enhancing ethical decision-making combines elements of philosophy with practical business acumen. I generally align with utilitarianism, a philosophical framework pioneered by Bentham. Utilitarianism posits that ethical conduct entails actions that maximize "utility" in the world, which I refer to as value here. This encompasses maximizing overall well-being and minimizing collective suffering. Achieving these objectives involves prioritizing decision-making efficiency, making moral choices without self-interest bias, and avoiding favoritism towards specific groups or nationalities, a behavior often referred to as tribalism. I assume that you, too, share similar goals, even if your philosophical orientation leans more towards individual rights, freedom, liberty, and autonomy. Even if you adhere to a different philosophical perspective, I encourage you to understand and appreciate the overarching aim of maximizing value within the constraints of that perspective.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

An Ethical nurse leader is defined in accordance with the Role of Nursing Leaders based on their actions, and not by a position of authority. Leaders in nursing inspire and influence others to achieve their maximum potential to reach the organizational goal in a manner that promote ethical and moral values among workers. It is clearly understood that leading by example and elimination of prejudice are two distinct ways of dealing by the participants in dealing with Issues arising in their areas where Ethical leadership is applied. As such, the prevention of biases shall be observed. Effective communication requires; respect, grace, empathy, active listening for adding value to the person being heard. Judging the motives of others is another communication obstacle to be avoided. No harm harmed physically, emotionally and psychologically the self-esteem of others, Being true to self, keeping promises and maintaining loyalty, so as being beneficial to others and trying to contribute to the general well-being of others. Are those the ways to handle the challenges while performing Ethical leadership, all approaches to conflict can be appropriate for specific situations, but they can also be inappropriate or overused. When conflict occurs, take time to consider which approach is most beneficial for the situation.

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nurse -patient interaction and performance of their ethical leadership. Leaders who sympathize can feel a sense of care for someone going through a difficult time. From a collective perspective, leaders can inspire those around them to behave ethically. By setting an example and giving the direction for ethical behavior, others will observe and act similarly. In this way, ethical leaders can positively influence many others, presenting them with a set of actions that they can adopt for the greater good thus it is recommended to from a collective perspective, leaders can inspire those around them to behave ethically. By setting an example and giving the direction for ethical behavior, others will observe and act similarly. In this way, ethical leaders can positively influence many others, presenting them with a set of actions that they can adopt for the greater good.

Based on the analyzed information discussed by the participants, the Nursing Organizations should include and strengthen the Nursing Service Manuals and policies concerning Value base Nursing responsibilities and Jurisprudence during the performance of their roles. The Hospital Administrators and other Nursing Authorities shall come up with a training program on Ethical Leadership which will enhance the cognitive, competence and affective domains of Nursing practices. A thematic Nursing practices and administration shall be governed by ethical and moral principles to improve the delivery of services to clients and co-members of the health teams. Provide staff members with the tools they need to identify personal ethical frameworks; nurse leaders should take these steps: Identify and discuss the nursing unit's common ethical dilemmas. Constant practice of Management leading by example shall be strengthen so that all new nurses will follow the rule of good moral and ethical conduct in the workplace. Utilize the Ethical Leadership Model in situations where leadership is needed to be observed and when it is necessary.

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