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Research Article

# Ethical Principles Applicable To Care of Covid-19 Clients- Lesotho: A Feedback of Pre and Post Workshop Questionnaire

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**Abstract: Background:** Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) emerged in 2019 and rapidly became a global pandemic, infecting millions and killing hundreds of thousands. The disease altered, in varying ways, the practices of health care providers, hospitals, clinics, and patients. **Aim:** The aim of this study was to evaluate the feedback on ethical principles applicable to care of COVID-19 clients from the workshops organized for nurses from the ten districts in the country. **Materials and Methods:** A pre-test post-test research study was conducted by the Department of Nursing of the National University of Lesotho. The workshops were designed with the purpose of capacitating nurse-midwives; working in hospitals found in the ten districts of Lesotho, with skills to prevent COVID-19, control COVID-19, care and manage COVID-19 patients and to handle all ethical issues that may arise in the care of COVID-19 patients. The total number of participants who were present at all the ten workshops was hundred and seventy three (173). Before starting the workshops, a pre-test questionnaire with sections on COVID-19 general knowledge, nursing process and COVID-19 patient, psychological care of patient with COVID-19 and legal and ethical aspects related to COVID-19 for nurses responsibility were distributed to the participants and collected after thirty minutes. A post-test questionnaire with exactly the same sections was again distributed to the participants after the workshop ended. **Results:** The response rate for the pre workshop was 100% and response rate for the post workshop was 98%. Regarding the general question asked about COVID-19 having ethical implications to nursing 31 (18.2%) of the participants marked the option “yes” before the workshop and 158 (92.7%) of them marked “yes” after the workshop. Understanding of legal and ethical aspects related to COVID-19 for nurses responsibility was found to have improved after the workshop finished. **Conclusion:** The present study concluded that feedback from the participants before and after the workshop proved the workshop conducted was successful in improving their Knowledge regarding legal and ethical principles applicable while dealing with COVID-19 clients.

**Keywords:** Feedback, Pre-test, Post-test, COVID-19.

## Background

COVID-19 is a novel strain of coronavirus that was first detected in China in December 2019 causing a severe pneumonia like illness [1-2]. Rapidly spreading globally, by early March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. By 8 April 2020, COVID-19 had infected 1.28 million people and caused 72,774 deaths [3]. The COVID-19 pandemic posed and continues to pose serious immense challenges for health care systems, particularly to nurses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare systems are under pressure to develop and implement “crisis standards of care” that outline procedures for disaster response, including allocation of resources for which demand is expected to exceed supply [4]. Although much attention has been paid to the

possibility of a shortage of mechanical ventilators for critically ill patients, examples of scarce resources also include medication for supportive care (e.g., sedatives and vasopressors), intensive care unit beds, operating room time, and healthcare professionals able to manage a potential surge in demand for acute care [5]. The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented unprecedented ethical challenges on nurses and other healthcare practitioners over the past several months [6]. Ethics refers to the study of moral judgements based on values, beliefs and attitudes that an individual or group possesses [7].

Ethical principles are the basis of all nursing practice and provide a framework to help the nurse in ethical decision making. The fundamental principles of medical ethics as defined by Beauchamp and Childress [8], also considered the building-blocks of people's morality, include: Beneficence, Non-maleficence, Autonomy and Justice. Beneficence involves acting for the good and welfare of others and including such attributes as kindness and charity. Non-maleficence is acting in such a way as to prevent harm to others or to inflict the minimal harm possible. While autonomy goes with recognizing the individual's right to self-determination and decision-making. Justice is acting in fairness to all individuals, treating others equally and showing all individuals the same degree of respect and concern. On the other hand veracity involves being truthful, trustworthy, and accurate in all interactions with others. Fidelity: Being loyal and faithful to individuals who place trust in the nurse is referred to as fidelity. Lastly, Integrity involves acting consistently with honesty and basing actions of moral standards [9].

Nurses face ethical dilemmas on a daily basis which need experience, critical thinking, and an ability to evaluate the ethical principles relating to an existing problem and make the best ethical decision that helps to solve the problem [10]. An ethical issue can arise in any healthcare situation where profound moral questions of right or wrong underlie professional decision-making and the nursing care of patients [11-12]. Health professionals especially nurses face ethical challenges in their daily practice as they are required to provide autonomous and collaborative care to individuals of all ages, while adhering to the ethical principles [13-14]. The situation becomes particularly complex for nurses who work during pandemics, including COVID -19, and under severe resource constraints. Additionally due to the demographic, social, scientific and technological aspects of health care, there has been an increase in complexity of ethical issues faced in the health care service delivery. Ethical issues in the nursing practice attract little attention, resulting in the creation of moral distress, poor professional care, unproductivity and conflict [15-16].

The overall goal of these strategic workshops was to improve awareness of ethical principles applicable in the care of COVID-19 clients in Lesotho, and to achieve the workshop goal, a total of ten trainings were conducted; one training per district. The workshop program covered: Epidemiology, IPC, clinical features and diagnosis of COVID-19, Nursing management of a Covid-19 Client: ARDS and Septic Shock, Caring precautions for patients on mechanical ventilator, Psychological care of patient with COVID-19, Legal and ethical aspects related to COVID-19 for nurses responsibility and Handling specific concerns related to COVID-19 nursing Unit.

The effectiveness of these workshops can be assessed by the pre-test and post-test questionnaires; therefore the aim of this study was to evaluate the feedback of the ten one-day workshops that were organized for nurses by the Department of Nursing of the National University of Lesotho.

## **Materials and Methods**

A pre-test post-test research study was conducted by the four lecturers from the National University of Lesotho; Department of Nursing. A total of ten one day workshops on COVID-19 prevention, COVID-19 control, care and management of COVID-19 patients and handling all ethical issues that may arise in the care of COVID-19 were designed and conducted for the nurses working in all the ten Districts of Lesotho. The total number of participants present on the days of the workshops was one hundred and seventy three (173). The recruited participants who were absent on the day of

workshop were excluded from the study. The Ministry of Health Lesotho was requested to provide twenty nurses from each hospital. The Nursing directorate liaised with Hospital Nursing Service Managers in the recruitment of participants. Permission to conduct the training workshops was granted by the Nursing directorate at the Ministry of Health in Lesotho. Participation in the training workshops and completion of the questionnaires was entirely voluntary.

The workshops were conducted by qualified and competent facilitators from the Department of Nursing. Before starting the workshops, a pre-test questionnaire based on COVID-19 prevention, COVID-19 control, care and management of COVID-19 patients and handling all ethical issues that may arise in the care of COVID-19 was distributed to the participants and collected after an interval of thirty minutes.

A post-test questionnaire was again distributed to the participants after the workshops ended. Data was entered and analyzed for frequency and percentages by using IBM SPSS version 22. *P*-Value was kept at 0.05 as significant value.

### Results

One hundred and seventy three nurses of varying cadres participated in the study. The demographic distribution of nurses from each workshop is shown in Table 1. A total of two hundred pre-test and two hundred post-test questionnaires were printed and only hundred and seventy three were used.

**Table 1. Demographic distribution of nurses**

District	Cadre	#	Male	Female	Unknown
Berea	Nurses	16	3	9	4
Mafeteng	Nurses	16	1	15	
Mohale's Hoek	Nurses	17	1	17	
	Manager Hospital Nursing Services	1			
Quthing	Nurses	17	2	16	
	Manager Hospital Nursing Services	1			
Leribe	Nurses	19	2	17	
Butha Buthe	Nurses	18	4	16	
	Manager Hospital Nursing Services	2			
Mokhotlong	Nurses	16			
	Coordinator Departmental Nursing Services	1	1	16	
Qacha's Nek	Nurses	13	3	8	3
	Manager Hospital Nursing Services	1			
Thaba-Tseka	Nurses	16	6	12	
	Manager Hospital Nursing Services	2			
Maseru	Nurses	17	3	9	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>173</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>12</b>

The response rate for the pre-workshop tests was 100% and response rate for the post-workshop tests was 98%. One hundred and seventy three nurses filled the pre-workshop questionnaire and one hundred and seventy nurses filled the post-workshop questionnaire. Regarding the question asked about the applicability of ethics when caring for a COVID-19 patient, 31 (18.2%) of the nurses marked the option “yes” before the workshop and 158 (92.7%) 31 of them marked “yes” after the workshop. After the workshops understanding on applicability of ethical principles during the care of a COVID-19 patient was found to have improved. Statistically significant results were obtained for each question asked.

Table 2 showed frequency and percentages before and after the workshop.

**Table 2. Comparison of pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires**

Questions	Pre-workshop		Post-workshop		P-value
	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	
Does COVID-19 have ethical implications to nursing?	31 (18.2%)	142 (81.8%)	158 (92.7%)	12 (7.3%)	0.000
Does the principle of autonomy apply in the context of COVID-19 patient care?	63 (36.4%)	110 (63.6%)	166 (97.6%)	4 (2.4%)	0.000
Does the principle of beneficence apply in the context of COVID-19 patient care?	83 (47.7%)	90 (52.3%)	162 (95.1%)	8 (4.9%)	0.000
Does the principle of non-maleficence apply in the context of COVID-19 patient care?	94 (54.5%)	79 (45.5%)	158 (92.7%)	12 (7.3%)	0.000
Does the principle of utility apply in the context of COVID-19 patient care?	63 (36.4%)	110 (63.6%)	153 (90.2%)	7 (9.8%)	0.000
Does the principle of confidentiality apply in the context of COVID-19 patient care?	94 (54.5%)	79 (45.5%)	158 (92.7%)	12 (7.3%)	0.000
Does the principle of fidelity apply in the context of COVID-19 patient care?	47 (27.3%)	126 (72.7%)	158 (92.7%)	12 (7.3%)	0.000
Does the principle of justice apply in the context of COVID-19 patient care?	79 (45.5%)	94 (54.5%)	153 (90.2%)	7 (9.8%)	0.000

**Discussion**

One-day workshops were conducted by the Department of Nursing of the National University of Lesotho in the ten districts of Lesotho. The workshops focused on COVID-19 prevention and control, care and management of COVID-19 patients as well as handling ethical issues that may arise in the care of COVID-19 patients. The present study was designed to evaluate if nurses knowledge about the ethical principles applicable in the care of COVID-19 clients had improved after the workshops. The questions included were whether the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, utility, confidentiality, fidelity and justice apply in the care of COVID-19 clients. The feedback of the study was done through the pre-test and post-test questionnaire. It was found that there was significant improvement with all the questions in post-test questionnaire. Similar observations were made by Ajuwon and Kass [17] in Ethiopia in a qualitative research which showed the effectiveness of a research ethics workshop among students and faculty. In this study the investigators organized three rounds of workshop each session lasting seven hours using various methods such as group work, case studies and lectures which showed a significant increase in knowledge, attitude and skills towards research ethics among faculty following the workshop [17]. Consistent with the current study, in a study conducted by Ramalingam, Bhuvanewari and Sankaran [18], the overall increase in knowledge, attitude and skills domain after the workshop was statistically significant in both the faculty and postgraduates.

Furthermore, Abu, Khalidi, Baig and Khan [19] in their post-workshop study, found that the workshop on refining knowledge, attitude and practice of evidence-based medicine (EBM) among pharmacy students for professional challenges had a positive impact on the students.

The current study also supports that workshops and short trainings can bring about a desired change. The study finding resembles those of Barchi et al. [20], whose randomised control study on two groups of researchers in Botswana in building research capacity showed the effectiveness of short training programs. The study included two groups which included a two day program and the intervention group which received online cases and discussions. The results of the study showed that in-person seminars were more effective. Similar observations were made by Abu et al. [19]. Dimple,

Hiwarkar, and Shrigiriwar [21] reported a constructive feedback on improvement of the workshop. The objective of their study was to take feedback of participant residents and assess their reaction/perception at Kirkpatrick level one. These findings are enough to substantiate that short term in person training in ethics is effective. In line with Bah and Sey-Sawo [10], we conclude that there is inadequate teaching and implementation of the code of ethics and values in nursing profession which can have a negative impact on the quality of nursing care and result in increased risk for legal litigation of nurses, therefore there is a need for continuous professional development in ethics and professionalism.

### **Limitations of Study**

The limitations of the study included that the workshops required two or more days instead of just one. There were too many things discussed within that short space of time which were difficult to comprehend all at once.

### **Conclusion**

The present study concluded that feedback from the participants before and after the workshop proved the workshop conducted was successful in improving their knowledge regarding applicability of ethical principles in the care of COVID-19 clients.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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