

CASE STUDY 1: PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Professional conduct can be described as the manner in which the nurse practitioner conducts him/herself in a professional capacity, at work, with patients and community, including attitude and appearance. When a nurse accepts employment in an organisation, he or she declares that she has the knowledge, skill, integrity, commitment and is willing to assist wherever is necessary and work as a collaborative member of the team. He or she also has rights and responsibilities to self, their employer and the patient. These can be written as a contract which has to be signed or by virtue of development and maturity gained through education and training, understood. Some of these undertakings include:

- Employer-employee relationship which must be based on loyalty, mutual trust and respect
- Employee relationship with her job, i.e., respect for her work include assuming duty and remaining on the work premises for the agreed hours, committed professional appearance at all times and display knowledge of work processes and procedures and an understanding of the social contract
- Nurse-patient relationship includes approaching every patient with respect, consideration of diverse cultures and individual uniqueness.

SCENARIO: PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

St Columbus* Hospital is a regional hospital in one of South Africa's low-resourced provinces. It is overcrowded and short-staffed, especially with registered professional nurses. Some of the enrolled nurses perform duties beyond their scope. Working overtime in the wards is the order of the day. Nurses are moved around to assist where there is a shortage. Nurses do this willingly. Recently the hospital has had bad publicity where an elderly patient had fallen out of bed and fractured her femur and the relatives sued the hospital for negligence. Visiting a relative of mine, the low morale of staff was palpable.

The attire, i.e., shoes and dress code (uniform): Some of the nurses' uniform was of the 'dry clean' material and was worn repeatedly before it was dry cleaned again. The shoes were either very flat or sloppy or very high and not suitable for a full day's work in a busy medical ward. Other nurses even had takkies on.

- The ward was not dirty; but it was noisy and cluttered
- The patients ate from paper plates
- Some of the bed linen had not been changed for days

One of the nurses did not look very tidy: her hair was unkempt and she had long, painted nails. I was pleasantly surprised; she greeted us (the visitors) and requested if she could have a word or two with the patient in our presence which we agreed to. She was actually continuing with their health education talk which she needed us to be part of.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Bases on the scenario, what is your impression of:
 - the professional conduct of nurses in this hospital in general and in particular in this specific medical ward
 - the obligations of the employer to the employees
 - the unwritten contract between the employer and employee
 - the unwritten social contract between the employer-employee-patient

2. What advice would you give to the Nursing administrators at the hospital to help encourage professional conduct?
3. How does the level of professional conduct impact:
 - Patients
 - Nurses themselves
 - Families of the patients
4. If you were an enrolled nurse at St Columbus, how would you respond to the conditions depicted in the above scenario

* (The name of the hospital is fictitious)