

## **ETHICAL & PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE FOR THE EUROPEAN PAEDIATRIC NURSE**

### **A Policy Statement by the Paediatric Nursing Associations of Europe (PNAE)**

#### **Scope**

The purpose of this policy statement is to:

- Delineate the concept of professionalism for paediatric nurses.
- Provide a brief statement of the ethical and professional principles to guide professional behaviour and practice of paediatric nurses.
- Underpin the provision of high quality nursing care and services for children and young people across Europe.

#### **Introduction**

Paediatric health care is being transformed in response to the changing economic climate and the shift from tertiary care to primary care. Families of ill children and/or children with special needs are threatened by drastic cuts in services and reduced or limited access to healthcare specialists. Paediatric nurses may have to deal with conflicts and intense ethical dilemmas about which values should guide the provision of care. Paediatric nurses across Europe will have to balance their ethical obligations to the patients and their families, other healthcare professionals, their institutions, and to society.

Therefore, nowadays ethical knowing is more essential than ever to paediatric nursing since the discipline has a moral obligation to provide services to children and their families. Paediatric nurses are responsible for conserving children's lives, alleviating suffering and promoting health (Nouredine, 2001). Ethics includes values, codes, and principles that govern decisions in paediatric nursing practice and relationships. Ethical principles are necessary to guide professional development. A code of ethics functions as a tool and necessary mark of a profession and professional self-definition (Davis, 2008).

Paediatric nurses should be conversant with and abide by the principles of Health Care Ethics such as (ICN, 2005):

- **Beneficence** (Safeguard and promote the interest and well being of children and their families)
- **Non-maleficence** (Avoid doing harm, prevent harm, protect from harm)
- **Autonomy** (Self determination or parental consent (depending on the age of child), full disclosure, privacy)
- **Justice** (Treatment of all children and their families equally and fairly)
- **Veracity** (Provision of honest and accurate information to children and families)
- **Privacy** (Protection of personal information, limited body exposure)
- **Confidentiality** (Protection of personal information, trust relationship)

- **Accountability** (Justifying actions, responsibility, professionalism)
- **Fidelity** (Faithfulness, constancy or loyalty to terms and responsibilities of the profession, involves trust)

### **Paediatric Nurses' Professional Values**

Paediatric nurses should be conversant with and adhere to professional values and performance such as (AAP, 2007; NMC, 2008):

- **Integrity** (Fairness, commitment, honesty both with children, families and peers in all professional communication, nondiscrimination, and conflict resolution)
- **Reliability and responsibility** (Accountability to children, families, other health professionals)
- **Respect** (Treating all children with respect to their individual worth with sensitivity to gender, race, and cultural differences)
- **Empathy** (Ability to understand children's and family members' reactions from their point of view)
- **Life-long Learning/Education/Competence** (Commitment to lifelong learning and education)
- **Self-limitation/Self-awareness** (Maturity to acknowledge deficiency (knowledge or technical skills) and ask for consultation or assistance)
- **Communication and collaboration** (Recognition that the child/young person, family and the health care team must work cooperatively and communicate effectively, recognition of appropriate boundaries in patient care)
- **Altruism and advocacy** (Devotion to children's wellbeing and rights beyond own interests and needs)
- **Maintenance of clear professional boundaries** (Refusal of gifts, favors or hospitality that might be interpreted as an attempt to gain preferential treatment, establish and actively maintain clear boundaries at all times with children their families and professionals).
- **Provision of a high standard of practice and care at all times** (Use of the best available evidence, maintenance of up to date skills and knowledge, retention of clear and accurate records)
- **Multi-sectorial working** (Collaborative team work must enhanced with respect to other health professionals or colleagues' skills, knowledge and expertise)

### **Ethical Practice**

The paediatric nurse, in all dimensions of care, practices with respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and uniqueness of every individual, unrestricted by any personal, social or economic consideration. The paediatric nurse's primary commitment is to the child, whether an individual, family, group, or community and acts in order to protect their health, safety and rights.

The paediatric nurse is responsible and accountable for their own nursing practice and consistent with the obligation to provide optimum care to the child and their family.

The paediatric nurse must maintain their competence, and continue personal and professional growth, along with the participation in establishing, maintaining, and improving health care environments and conditions of employment conducive to the provision of safety and quality health care.

The paediatric nurse is ethically obliged to participate in the advancement of the profession (education, clinical practice, knowledge development) and to collaborate with other health professionals to meet health needs.

Paediatric Nurses' Associations are responsible for articulating nursing values, for maintaining the integrity of the profession and practice, and for shaping social policy related to the care of children and young people (ANA, 2001).

### **Involving Children in Research**

Research involving children is important and should be supported, encouraged and conducted in an ethical manner. Legally valid consent should be obtained from the child, parent or guardian as appropriate (RCN, 2007).

Informed consent should be obtained before commencing data collection for those children deemed to be competent as per legislation and practice in each Country across Europe. Parents/guardians should be involved in the decision to participate wherever possible and in all cases where the child is not yet deemed to be competent. A child's refusal to participate/continue in research should be respected. If a child becomes upset by a procedure, researchers must accept this as a valid refusal (Gibson, Twycross, 2007). Consent should be considered an on-going process. Children can give consent if they are capable of choosing between alternative courses of action (RCN, 2005).

Children need sufficient information before they can decide whether to participate in a research study or not. This includes information about (Gibson, Twycross, 2007; RCN, 2000):

- **Scope of the research** (Identifiable benefit for children, is well designed and well conducted)
- **Possible risks** (Types of intervention, probability, timing, equity, interim finding)
- **Possible benefits** (Magnitude, probability, beneficiaries, resources)
- **Details of their role** (How invasive or intrusive is the research? (psychosocial research should be assessed as carefully as physical research))
- **Researchers experience and qualifications**
- **Funding**

### **Future Implications**

Paediatric Nursing Associations should lobby for legislation to promote children and young people's participation in decision-making and to protect their rights in practice.

Individual Paediatric Nursing Associations should develop their own in-depth guidance based on this position statement to inform paediatric nursing practice in their country.

### **End note**

This brief statement of principles emphasises the core professional values that paediatric nurses should adopt as an ethical foundation for quality health care for children and their families. The purpose of this statement is to identify the fundamental ethical standards and values to which the paediatric nursing profession is committed, and that are incorporated in other endorsed professional nursing guidelines and

standards of conduct. It can be used as a reference point for paediatric nurses across Europe, from which to reflect on the conduct of themselves and others and to guide ethical decision making and practice.

In conclusion, this policy statement is a strategic document that proposes critical ethical thinking and the development of paediatric codes of ethics that may be country-oriented and reflective of local cultural issues, but with a common platform and core values.

### **Key stakeholders**

This policy statement is a guidance document for use by paediatric nurses who are:

- Working in clinical practice and they care for children.
- Working in the community.
- Involved in research as research assistants, research nurses or lead researchers (including masters or doctoral students undertaking research).
- Members of ethics committees and they are involved in reviewing research proposals.
- Paediatric nurse educators with responsibility for teaching and supervising research projects.
- Children and young people that are subjects of research.
- Parents and organizations (National or International) involved in protecting children's rights.

### **References**

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