UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Introduction To Professional Ethics

2627-1-I0105D007-I0105D00702

Aims

The course introduces students to the understanding of ethical and deontological principles and concepts in patient care, focusing on the development of a knowledge base to their actions as “moral agents” and to apply ethical reasoning in professional practice. By the end of the course the student will have developed:

1. Knowledge and ability to understand
To describe:

- the concepts of morality, ethics, bioethics and deontology, explaining the differences and relationships between them;
- the main ethical theories and the role of the nurse as a moral agent;
- ethical concepts for nursing practice such as advocacy, accountability, cooperation and caring according to Fry & Johnstone's model as a foundation for ethical analysis and decision-making in nursing practice;
- the origins, structure and principles of the Code of Ethics for Nursing Professions.

2. Ability to apply knowledge and understanding
To analyse simulated clinical scenarios to identify emerging principles, ethical concepts and values.
To apply the Nursing Code of Ethics, by integrating it into practice in order to guide responsible care choices that respect the patients, their wishes and the specific care setting.

3. Autonomy of judgement
To critically evaluate the ethical, professional, relational, and care-related implications of ethical decision making in nursing, justifying them in light of values, ethical and professional principles, legal regulations, and related responsibilities, while respecting the dignity, wishes, and values of the patient.

4. Communication skills
To express professional judgement on ethical and value-based issues in a clear, empathetic, and respectful manner to patients, family members, and the healthcare team, promoting a climate of trust and mutual respect.

5. Ability to learn
To develop a continuous reflective and critical approach towards one's professional practice regarding ethical and deontological implications, through active participation in case analysis and discussion with peers and professors.

Contents

The meaning of morality, ethics, bioethics, and deontology
Ethical principles according to principalism
Ethical concepts for nursing practice according to Fry & Johnstone
National and international Codes of Ethics for the Nursing professions (structure, principles, and underlying ethical concepts)
Deontological and legal implications in professional practice concerning key professional issues, including reference to recent regulatory developments

Detailed program

Module 1: General Principles and Introduction to Ethics
The formation and nature of values (personal, moral, cultural, religious, and professional values); Values conflict and the concepts of morality, ethics, and bioethics; The nurse as a moral agent and ethical responsibility; Brief overview of Kohlberg's stages of moral development and key ethical approaches in healthcare (principalism, personalism, utilitarianism, etc.); Ethical principles: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, veracity and fidelity, and the moral integrity of the profession; Ethics and human rights: health as a fundamental right.

Module 2: Ethical Concepts for Nursing Practice
Core concepts: advocacy, accountability, cooperation, and caring according to Fry & Johnstone's ethical decision-making model;
Using the model as a framework for analysis, ethical reasoning, and decision-making in nursing practice.

Professional Deontology
Meaning, functions, and social role: deontology and the development of ethical codes within the nursing profession; Structure, functions, and general characteristics of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Code of Ethics for Nurses (2021) and the Code of Ethics for Nursing Professions (FNOPI, 2025); Analysis and discussion of the ethical and professional implications of key practice-related topics, including: Informed consent and advance directives (living wills); Personal data protection and the processing of personal information (data confidentiality and professional secrecy); Patient safety and the safety of care; Professional responsibilities related to compliance with the Code of Ethics.

Prerequisites

This course builds on the knowledge of Fundamentals of Nursing and Midwifery Sciences and Human Sciences.

Teaching form

All sessions, offered in Italian, begin with a lecture-based (deductive) approach, followed by interactive student engagement through inductive learning. This includes guided discussions, both in plenary sessions and small groups, focussing on simulated clinical cases with ethical implications, as well as the analysis of video sequences. All activities are conducted in person.

Textbook and teaching resource

Fry ST, Johnstone MJ (2004) Etica per la pratica infermieristica. Milano: CEA.

International Council of Nurses – ICN (2021) Il Codice Deontologico del Consiglio Internazionale degli Infermieri. Edizione italiana a cura della Consociazione Nazionale Infermiere/i (CNAI). Disponibile da: https://www.cnai.pro/codice-deontologico

Federazione Nazionale Ordini delle Professioni Infermieristiche - FNOPI (2025) Codice Deontologico delle Professioni Infermieristiche. Roma: FNOPI. Disponibile da: https://www.fnopi.it/norme-e-codici/deontologia/#1571846131365-8f70c763-6358

Campo A, Draoli N, Mastorianni C, Pittella D, Prandi C, Rosini I, Scipioni S. (2019) La disciplina infermieristica all'interno della Legge 219/17 "Norme in materia di consenso informato e di disposizioni anticipate di trattamento". Roma: FNOPI. Disponibile da: https://www.fnopi.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Linee-Guida-Fine-Vita.pdf

LEGGE 22 dicembre 2017, n. 219 "Norme in materia di consenso informato e di disposizioni anticipate di trattamento".

LEGGE 8 marzo 2017, n. 24 "Disposizioni in materia di sicurezza delle cure e della persona assistita, nonché in materia di responsabilità professionale degli esercenti le professioni sanitarie".

Semester

Second Semester

Assessment method

Assessment Methods: Written and oral examination covering the topics of the course syllabus and the core bibliography. There are no mid-term assessments.

Written Exam: 31 multiple-choice questions with only one correct answer, designed for a comprehensive assessment of student preparation (24 questions on Clinical Nursing; 7 questions on Introduction to Professional Deontology). No marks are deducted for incorrect or omitted answers. The cut-off score for admission to the oral exam is 18/30. The time allowed for the exam is 40 minutes. Results (pass/fail) are usually published within 3 days of the written test.

Oral Exam: within 15 days of the written exam. The assessment will evaluate the candidate's ability to demonstrate, clearly and comprehensively: the methods for assessing the patient's health status; nursing interventions for preventing and managing key care risks and problems; and the ethical and deontological implications of nursing practice.

Final Assessment: Graded on a 30-point scale, the final mark is calculated as a weighted average of the scores obtained in the individual components (written exam: 40% weighting; oral exam: 60% weighting). The final grade will be communicated directly at the end of the oral exam.

Office hours

By appointment.

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS