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Ethics at Work: What Nurses Really Do on the Job

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Recently, what nurses do while at work has been a topic of discussion. Most would say that nurses provide care for patients-whether in hospitals, clinics, factories, schools, or homes. The [American Nurses Association \(ANA\) Code of Ethics \(2015\)](#) states in Provision 2 that "The nurse's primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, community, or population," so it should not be surprising that people have seen nurses providing care to others or have themselves been the recipients of such care. The idea of providing care for someone encompasses many actions and/or activities and would, most likely, be perceived or defined differently by persons as individuals. So, what can be said is the difference that nurses can provide for people when caring for them? The difference is in their "presence."

Nurses provide care for patients throughout the life span and along the continuum of health care. As a result of their inherent role as lifelong caregivers, nurses are present for and with their patients. What is nursing "presence"? Presence in patient care is more than just being physically there; it is also being focused and attentive to others. A nurse needs to be "purposefully attentive to the moment, actively engaged in the present, sensitive to context, nonjudgmental, and empathic" ([Visser & Wysmans, 2010](#)).

Nursing presence has been defined as "a holistic and reciprocal exchange between the nurse and the patient that involves a sincere connection and sharing of the human experience through active listening, attentiveness, intimacy and therapeutic touch, spiritual exploration, empathy, caring and compassion, and recognition of the patient's psychological, psychosocial, and physiological needs" ([Hessel, 2009](#)). The presence

of the nurse means that the nurse's attention is not diverted elsewhere. Nurses are constantly assessing their patients as well as assessing their patients' environments so as to keep them safe and well. The nurse has authority, accountability, and responsibility for nursing practice; makes decisions; and takes action consistent with the obligation to promote health and to provide optimal care (ANA, 2015).

Nursing is a profession wherein nurses, as individual practitioners, have the ability to make a difference in the lives of those for whom they care. Nurses promote, advocate for, and protect the rights, health, and safety of the patient (ANA, 2015). They can do so because they are knowledgeable, they have integrity, and they are present for their work-which is the care of others in need. Nurses will attest to their skipping lunches or breaks while at work in order to provide care continuity for their patients. They work overtime and often work many varying shifts to ensure that quality patient care is maintained. Nurses are present for their patients 24/7 and their patients acknowledge this.

According to the most recent Gallup poll, more than four in five Americans (84%) rate the honesty and ethical standards of nurses as "very high" or "high," and this has earned nurses the top spot among a diverse list of professions for the 17th consecutive year (Brenan, 2018). The American public knows and identifies that nurses are there for them-and that their "presence" means that ethical care is provided with integrity. To divert attention and focus away from patients is to provide unethical care and that is not what nurses do while at work.

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