

ETHICS IN PSYCHIATRY

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Medical ethics, often named bioethics in specialised literature, is a subject with multiple philosophic, moral and normative implications. It is directly connected to medical practice and it concerns not only physicians, but also all assisting medical staff in this field. Psychiatry presents a series of specificities, as any other specialty for that matter. The psychiatric activity cannot take place without an experienced well-trained team. The team manages each case on different coordinates, so the physician, the psychologist and the nurses specialized in psychiatric nursing must respect the modern trends of psychiatry ethics, all the more so as the tradition of our clinic imposes a high degree of professionalism.

Ethic principles function in all countries, but they are applied differently, according to the cultural model and the education; they consist in benevolence, justice, autonomy, truthfulness and confidentiality.

Ethics can be considered a philosophic subject which focuses on the study of systems, values, rules and moral categories. We state and maintain the ethic specificities in psychiatry, established in the practical everyday reality. Cases impose a different ethic approach, which corresponds to the general problems of medical ethics, but is also different by its special features resulting from the major meanings and the deep implications in the treatment of mental illnesses and mental patients.

The nurse profession has always been connected to deontological (justice and morality) and ethic (moral) requirements, which have acquired specific features, as a result of the environment in which nurses live and work, under an outstanding moral training. Professional care in nursing depends on knowledge, competence and ethic behaviour. The basic care values are closeness, intimacy with other people, confidentiality, trust, friendship, self respect and respect towards the others. A series on medical ethic notions, such as confidentiality, the obligation to tell the truth or to obtain consent, are only justified with a view to patient's welfare. As to the medical practice, the physician should monitor not only the immediate effects of the therapeutic action on the patient and his/her family, but also the consequences of the medical procedure, that is its influence on the others and on society. We can notice therefore the tendency to turn a one-person decision into a decision that takes into account the common welfare and happiness. Even if the patient is admitted involuntarily, he/she must be treated under the same deontological and scientific conditions; the treatments which are risky or not scientifically acknowledged are excluded. In psychiatry, more than in any other medical branch, the patient's aptness is questionable, and there are multiple ethic implications in respect of his/her capability of making a decision.

In psychiatric practice, as in other fields, the restrictions imposed on the patient must be limited to those which are absolutely necessary according to his/her medical condition and to the effectiveness of the treatment. The assessment by different methods of a mental patient's aptness allows



the application of his/her rights to receive information on his/her condition, on the potential need of being admitted and on the therapeutic alternatives.

In psychiatric care, the confidence in the staff and the atmosphere are particularly important, as it makes him/her feel that he/she is getting the best treatment and the best care. The nurses must respect patients' values and choices, even if they do not agree, and must avoid imposing their personal values on the patients. In nursing, it is particularly important to develop and train the main aspect of communication, namely the ability to listen.

For nursing practice in psychiatric assistance, building trust-based relationships is very important. In order to gain the patient's trust, that is the foundation of all human relationships, the nurse must show outstanding moral behaviour, impeccable professional competence, honesty, kindness, empathy and consistency. Interpersonal relations can only be based on a fair, objective assessment of each one's capacity. Without crossing competence boundaries, a nurse must be sincere, honest-minded, truthful as to patients and illnesses; he/she must also promote health, prevent illnesses, restore health and hopes and comfort the patient and his/her family.

Psychiatrists, psychiatry nurses and the other members of society have the duty to participate actively in the protection of persons with mental illnesses.