NURSE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE at the
UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND SCHOOL OF NURSING

How to Lead with Confidence through Healthcare Challenges without Wavering from our Moral Compass

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Introduction

Healthcare challenges are more prominent now in the COVID pandemic that are requiring nurse leaders to be creative in the way they lead. However, there is controversy about whether nurse leaders are equipped to lead and advocate for patients and front line staff in a way that does not cause moral distress.

Moral distress: Defined as experiencing difficulty or imbalance due to an inability to follow the morally correct action (Dalmolin et al., 2012; Smith, 2017).

Leading with confidence during these challenging times can lead to inconsistencies as we struggle not to waver from our moral compass.

A moral compass: The inner voice telling us <u>right from wrong</u> (Moore & Gino, 2013; Smith, 2017). Equally important, the evolving complexity of COVID-19 strongly encourages leaders to develop models to strengthen moral compass for direct care providers, nurse leaders, and those in academia.

Literature Review

Nurses need to **understand barriers to moral issues** and **have available tools** to reduce those barriers (Dalmolin et al., 2012).

Nurse leaders must focus on understanding their moral compass. Emotional symptoms of moral distress include: frustration, anxiety, anger, and guilt. Physical symptoms of moral distress include sweating, headaches, diarrhea, crying, low self-esteem, and loss of integrity (Dalmolin et al., 2012).

According to Dalmolin et al., **job dissatisfaction** is an issue as people are challenged with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal fulfillment at work as a result of moral distress (2012, pg 201).

Job dissatisfaction can lead to horizontal violence, bullying, and high turnover rates (Edmonson, 2015.) Therefore, nurse leaders must change their practices to become role models by motivating and **encouraging staff** to take necessary measures **to both identify moral distress and report conditions that can challenge the success of the work environment** (Dalmolin et al., 2012).

Recommendations from the Evidence

- **Develop** a strong moral compass and **demonstrate** this through practice
- Create a **moral compass tool** for **moral guidance**
- Use **self-reflection** to look closely at the dilemma and attempt to determine what about the situation is causing the moral distress (Hartmann et al., 2018.)
- When nurse leaders were **instructed on and provided** a moral courage model to follow the leaders felt better able to act in a **morally courageous manner** (Edmondson, 2015).
- **SBAR communication tool** has won acclaim in healthcare circles from organizations such as The Joint Commission (Stewart & Hand, 2017).

Personal Reflections

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Conclusion: Moral Compass

- Will be **refined over time**
- An **essential component** of leadership
- A method to **compare actual life with ideal life** is a nursing leadership imperative
- Ability to **self-reflect** and **self-examine** is **also a strength for leaders** to have and hone
- This skill can begin as early as **the beginning of nursing school** and can help guide the moral course of a nurse up to and including **the lifespan of an entire career**.
- For every level and step of the nursing profession, having the **objective moral compass tool** can help **develop strong nurse leaders** who can be seen as the **present and future of the nursing profession**.

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