

THE ETHICAL MANDATE OF NURSING BOARDS. PROGRAM THEORY TO STRENGTHEN NURSING PROFESSION AND HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Background

In recent years, some German States have established nursing boards as self-governing bodies for nursing in order to improve health care[1]. Other states are on the way to doing so, some haven't yet recognized this resource for the health care system, few have impatiently given it up again. The topic area of ethics is a normative component of nursing boards. However, it is still unclear what effect ethics should have and what mandate is derived from this.

Aim(s)

Although individual efforts have been made recently, the systematic analysis of the field and the identification of effective interventions to fill the ethical mandate are still missing. The possibilities for strengthening the health system should be recognized, the potential of nurses as change agents should be made visible. This gap is filled by the presented dissertation[2]. It sets out to develop a program theory of the ethical mandate of nursing boards.

Methods

Program theories describe and explain new fields of knowledge, penetrate them systematically, and justify purposeful intervention programs that fit to the target group[3]. Program theories consist of two interacting sub-theories, the strategically oriented Theory of Change, and the operational Theory of Action[3]. The basis for designing a program theory is a detailed situation analysis[3]. Following the qualitative approach of case studies, sources of different origin are examined with the help of a scoping study[3, 4].

Results

From the analysis results Logic Models are built[3], which synthesize the found situation as well as the causes and effects logically argumentatively related to the topic. Three relevant strands of argumentation were identified: ethics as a normatively set building block in German nursing boards; ethics in the German health care system and the inclusion of the desiderata of the nursing profession; the ethical mandate of nursing boards on the political level.

Discussion

"Nursing is a deeply moral activity"[5]. The profession of nursing bases its professionalism on moral norms that need to be reflected ethically[6]. This integrative professionalism operates in the nursing relationship and in the political arena. The implementation of the mandate, the responsibility for safeguarding of the professionally and ethically founded professional nursing action, succeeds to the nursing boards via a suitable program theory. The recommended program theory includes as Theory of Change the Klagenfurt Intervention Research[7, 8], which strategically focuses on the transdisciplinary participation of board members[9, 10]. The operational Theory of Action is the Ten Essential Public Health Services process model[11]. Its core is equity[11], it is strengthened by Trontos political ethical theory of care[12]. These discuss the filling of the ethical mandate of nursing boards with concrete content.

Implications and future perspectives

The fusion of the three sub-theories results in the desired program theory, which enables successful care work in the direct care relationship and in the political space via Care for the Caregivers[2]. Nursing boards could navigate the future of healthcare, nurses could be the drivers for change in the German healthcare system.

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