

ACADEMY OF FORENSIC NURSING
Ethical Standards of Forensic Nursing Statement



TITLE:

Ethical Standards of Forensic Nursing

AUTHORS:

Ethics Committee Chair: Ecoee Rooney, DNP, RN, NPD-BC, SANE-A, DF-AFN

Ethics Committee Members:

Barbra A. Bachmeier JD, MSN, APRN, NP-C, DF-AFN, FAEN, Jacqueline Cheek, DNP, RN, SANE-P, Theresa Fay-Hillier, DrPH, MSN, PMHCNS-BC, Elizabeth A. Goodman, DNP, MSN, BSN, FNP-C, RN, AFN-BC, CEN, SANE-A, SANE-P

In 2018, a group of dedicated forensic nurses united to form the Academy of Forensic Nursing, a professional organization dedicated to the elevation of forensic nursing practice, to model and further define standards of the specialty by linking research to practice through scholarship, education, in order to improve service to all who are impacted by or experiencing unintentional or intentional violence or trauma. Forensic nurses recognize that they are called upon to care for society's most vulnerable people, often at times of extreme crisis. As such, forensic nurses hold ethical standards as a core foundational element of practice at the bedside, during interaction with others, and through the education of current and future forensic nurses. Forensic nurses recognize that self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues and healthcare providers are essential elements of ethical forensic nursing practice (CNA, 2017, p. 4).



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Through self-reflection, forensic nurses evaluate their interactions with others, their competence and ability to enable the provision of safe, compassionate, competent, and ethical care (CNA, 2017, p. 5). Guided by The Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements by the American Nurses Association (2015) and other resources this Committee developed this Ethical Standards of Forensic Nursing Statement as a framework to guide professional practice in all settings.

Provision 1: *The nurse practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person* (ANA, 2015, p. 8).

Nurses are often one of the first care providers of those who have experienced trauma. Those first interactions with the healthcare system create an opportunity to establish a healing, trauma-informed environment through demonstrating compassion, unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951), and providing non-judgmental and equitable care to those individuals, families, groups, or populations. Forensic nurses provide care that reflects the intrinsic worth of all human beings and recognizes that each patient brings unique characteristics to each nursing encounter. Forensic nurses do not discriminate on the basis of a person's race, ethnicity, culture, political and spiritual beliefs, social or marital status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, health status, place of origin, lifestyle, mental or physical ability, socio-economic status, or any other attribute and refrain from judging, labelling, or stigmatizing any persons (CNA, 2017, p.15). Forensic nurses commit to honor differences while supporting wholeness in all patients, reinforcing that all human life has value and should be protected and cared for in all nursing practices.

Provision 2: *The nurse's primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, community, or population* (ANA, 2015, p. 8).

Opportunities for forensic nursing practice range broadly from individual, acute, and chronic traumatic circumstances to local, regional, national, and international conditions involving trauma. Forensic nurses are trained and prepared to respond and support individuals who have experienced trauma. The AFN represents forensic nurses who provide services across the lifespan, across the micro to macro spectrum, from an individual traumatic event to a population that has been negatively impacted by mass disaster. The ethical obligation in each of these situations is to provide care rooted in science, evidence, and therapeutic communication, seeking all opportunities to promote the autonomy and personhood of the people forensic nurses serve for the best outcomes. As stated in the Academy of Forensic Nursing's (AFN) Trauma, Violence & Resilience Informed Care (2021) position statement, forensic nurses proactively meet the needs of patients impacted by trauma, violence, and abuse, promoting trauma-informed care in all services to create a safe, effective, healing environment for victims and survivors.



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Provision 3: *The nurse promotes, advocates for, and protects the rights, health, and safety of the patient* (ANA, 2015, p. 8).

Forensic nurses recognize the acute and/or chronic vulnerability of the people they serve, understanding that trauma has impacted their perceptions of safety, personhood, autonomy, and agency. Forensic nurses must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest that arise in this role and resolve them in the interests of the persons receiving their care (CNA, 2017, p. 23). Through the experiences that create the need for forensic nursing care, forensic nurses recognize that patients require support in restoring a sense of autonomy and safety, personhood, and agency. The forensic nurse must seek to support each patient in self-determination and agency in making fully informed decisions and providing consent and in navigating the ever-evolving technologies which are included in forensic nursing care, including telehealth, storage and sharing of private health images and information. The forensic nurse provides for establishing a care relationship that creates the environment whereby patients can express their wishes, establish their autonomy, express their concerns, and understand their rights in the context of their circumstances. The ways in which forensic nurses are prepared to understand and support the needs of people forensic nurses serve, include advocacy for safety including safe housing, freedom from abuse and neglect, clean air, and water; providing information for patients to receive legal representation, health promotion and anticipated preventive care.

Provision 4: *The nurse has authority, accountability, and responsibility for nursing practice; makes decisions; and acts consistent with the obligation to promote health and to provide optimal care* (ANA, 2015, p. 8).

Forensic nurses employ evidence informed clinical knowledge to influence the nursing process to serve people and communities through holistic nursing care. They assess, diagnose, plan care, intervene, and evaluate interventions to ensure the best possible outcomes for those receiving care. Forensic nurses are accountable to patients and communities where they practice, to providing care to patients who are informed and have consented to care, understanding the risk-benefit balance, the privacy and confidentiality of their data, and the monitoring of its use (CNA, 2017, p. 9). Forensic nurses drive evidence-based practice to promote the growth of forensic nursing knowledge as a component of professional accountability to patients, the community at large, and the profession of forensic nursing. The AFN supports this accountability through the promotion of best-practices and research to advance the practice of forensic nursing. Through regular collaborative partnership meetings, educational opportunities, committee work, research, and scholarly practice, forensic nurses may grow to improve practice and therefore offer the informed and individualized care to those receiving forensic nursing services. Accountability and action to this principle is realized through virtual and in-person learning and collaborative events disseminating current and optimal practice.



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Provision 5: The nurse owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety, preserve wholeness of character and integrity, maintain competence, and continue personal and professional growth (ANA, 2015, p.8).

Forensic nurses recognize the importance of caring for self and colleagues. Forensic nurses recognize that in order to help others, they must maintain personal health and safety, preserve character and integrity, maintain competence in professional practice, and continue personal and professional growth. As a community, AFN offers continuing education to members in various areas of forensic nursing practice, bringing together subject experts from around the United States and the international community to promote learning and dialogue regarding forensic nursing best practices. The AFN offers members the opportunity to choose Special Interest Groups (SIG) where support and collaboration may occur virtually and in-person, concurrently or asynchronously. AFN's Interprofessional Collaboration committee promotes the ongoing development and collegiality of the AFN and to facilitate collaboration among forensic nurses as well as other professionals and organizations supporting forensic nursing.

Provision 6: The nurse, through individual and collective effort, establishes, maintains, and improves the ethical environment of the work setting and conditions of employment that are conducive to safe, quality health care (ANA, 2015, p. 8).

Forensic nurses must seek to ensure the quality of their professional work setting by continually advocating to improve conditions for assessment and treatment of patients, seeking to put patients and their needs first and foremost in all areas of clinical practice. The AFN Podcast Committee that features specialists to share the latest research findings with the general membership with the goal to improve work settings and conditions in a uniform manner. Recognizing intrinsic and extrinsic threats to wellbeing and profession, forensic nurses acknowledge unmitigated lateral violence and a lack of self-care as core factors that weaken relationships, teams, the ability to be generative, and the profession as a whole and refrain from any form of workplace bullying (CNA, 2017, p.15). Forensic nurses must commit to eradicate lateral violence in the profession and create positive and strong mentoring relationships with current and future colleagues.

Provision 7: The nurse, in all roles and settings, advances the profession through research and scholarly inquiry, professional standards development, and the generation of both nursing and health policy (ANA, 2015, p. 8).

Forensic nurses recognize that the foundation of optimal nursing practice requires the promotion of rigorous research and scholarly inquiry and an environment that promotes inquiry. The identification of significant findings should then be applied to professional standards and lead to evidence-informed



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practice, including knowledge of the quality of current science. It is the position of the Academy of Forensic Nursing and the ethical obligation of forensic nurses to adequately and accurately translate the most current available evidence to ensure safe and effective clinical practice and to guide patient care (AFN, 2021). The National Institute for Nursing Research's (NIH) mission statement identifies the opportunity for research to employ a "holistic perspective to improve health and advance health equity by identifying nursing practice and policy solutions, across clinical and community settings, that are responsive to the realities of people's lives and living conditions." Therefore, forensic nurses are presented with the opportunity and obligation to learn from and translate evidence into practice.

The AFN Research Committee is responsible for facilitating the advancement of forensic nursing practice through science and facilitate the generation of evidence upon which quality forensic nursing practice is founded. The AFN Podcast Committee and the AFN Journal Committee both seek to disseminate current research findings to the forensic nursing community to promote practice rooted in evidence. The AFN Education Committee works to integrate current research findings into the educational offerings to members of the organization. The goal of conducting ethical forensic nursing research is to disseminate findings, and improve forensic nursing practice, and the practice of associated professionals on a continual basis.

Provision 8: The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public to protect human rights, promote health diplomacy, and reduce health disparities (ANA, 2015, p. 8).

Forensic nurses recognize the impact of health disparities in the United States on local, regional, and national levels and acknowledge similar health disparities internationally. The World Health Organization (2017, para. 1) defines social determinants of health as "conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels, which are themselves influenced by policy choices." AFN leadership and members are committed to protecting human rights in all settings, promoting health equity for all (individuals, families, groups, and populations) in all aspects of practice.

Promoting health equity includes education, advocacy, and interaction with all who seek assistance is endemic to the purpose and profession of forensic nursing. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2021) provides a list of objectives to improve health in the U.S.; twenty objectives are related to addressing violence in the U.S. from reducing firearm related injuries and sexual and dating violence, to mitigating adverse childhood experiences, such as child sexual and physical abuse, and caretaker substance abuse. These objectives intersect with the work of forensic nurses and can be addressed through a collective focus, intention, and support. Forensic nurses work toward preventing and minimizing all forms of violence by anticipating and assessing the risk for violent situations and by



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collaborating with others to establish preventive measures, or to take action to minimize risk and protect others and self, if violence occurs (CNA, 2017, p. 9).

Additionally, forensic nurses are key players in achieving health equity globally. According to the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2021) it will be necessary to drive work within and across disciplines, and health professions with aspirations to advance the inclusive culture required for real change.

Provision 9: The profession of nursing, collectively through its professional organizations, must articulate nursing values, maintain the integrity of the profession, and integrate principles of social justice into nursing and health policy (ANA, 2015, p.8).

It is the professional obligation of forensic nurses to maintain professional integrity and to work together to integrate social justice into nursing and health policy. Forensic nurses serve as advocates for patients and profession both in the work/clinical setting, where health policy is written, and in the public's perception of forensic nursing practice. There is tremendous benefit to the public when forensic nurses endorse social justice in the development of healthcare policy on behalf of the greater good. As stated by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (2021) all forensic scientists must accurately and completely represent their education, training, experience, and area(s) of expertise for the safety of the patient and public. The public must understand that forensic nursing serves the public, and the ways in which forensic nurses provide support, promote health, safety, and equity in all settings.



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