

# Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics 2004

## Relevant Clauses

1. Consider first the well-being of the patient.
18. Provide whatever appropriate assistance you can to any person with an urgent need for medical care.

Source: Canadian Medical Association (2004). Code of Ethics. Available from [http://www.cma.ca/index.cfm/ci\\_id/53556/la\\_id/1.htm](http://www.cma.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/53556/la_id/1.htm)

# Canadian Nursing Association Code of Ethics 2008

## Relevant Clauses

### Nursing Values and Ethical Responsibilities

#### **A. Providing Safe, Compassionate, Competent and Ethical Care**

6. When resources are not available to provide ideal care, nurses collaborate with others to adjust priorities and minimize harm. Nurses keep persons receiving care, families and employers informed about potential and actual changes to delivery of care. They inform employers about potential threats to safety.
8. During a natural or human-made disaster, including a communicable disease outbreak, nurses have a duty to provide care using appropriate safety precautions.

### Appendix D: Applying the Code in Selected Circumstances

#### **Ethical Considerations for Nurses in a Natural or Human-Made Disaster, Communicable Disease Outbreak or Pandemic**

Historically and currently, nurses provide care to those in need, even when providing care puts their own health and life at risk (for example, when they work in war-torn areas, places of poverty, in places with poor sanitation, etc.). Nurses also encounter personal risk when providing care for those with known or unknown communicable or infectious disease. However, disasters and communicable disease outbreaks call for extraordinary effort from all health-care personnel, including registered nurses. The code states:

*During a natural or human-made disaster, including a communicable disease outbreak, nurses have a duty to provide care using appropriate safety precautions. (Code, A8)*

A duty to provide care refers to a nurse's professional obligation to provide persons receiving care with safe, competent, compassionate and ethical care. However, there may be some circumstances in which it is acceptable for a nurse to withdraw from providing care or to refuse to provide care (CRNBC, 2007; CRNNS, 2006a). Unreasonable burden is a concept raised in relation to the duty to provide care and withdrawing from providing or refusing to provide care.

An unreasonable burden may exist when a nurses' ability to provide safe care and meet professional standards of practice is compromised by unreasonable expectations, lack of resources or ongoing threats to personal well-being (CRNBC, 2007).

The following criteria could be useful for nurses to consider when contemplating their obligation to provide care in a disaster or communicable disease outbreak:

- The significance of the risk to the person in care if the nurse does not assist;
- Whether the nurse's intervention is directly relevant to preventing harm
- Whether the nurses' care will probably prevent harm; and
- Whether the benefit of the nurse's intervention outweighs harms the nurse might incur and does not present more than an acceptable risk to the nurse (ANA, 2006)

When demands on the health-care system are excessive, material resources may be in short supply and nurses and other health-care providers may be at risk. Nurses have a right to receive truthful and complete information so that they can fulfill their duty to provide care. They must also be supported in meeting their own health needs. Nurses' employers have a reciprocal duty to protect and support them as well as to provide necessary and sufficient protective equipment and supplies that will "maximally minimize risk" to nurses and other health-care providers (Human Resource Recommendations, SARS Human Resources Working Group, Ontario Hospital Association, as recorded in Godkin & Markwell, 2003). Nurses will also need to use their professional judgment to select and use the appropriate prevention measures; select, in collaboration with the healthcare team, the appropriate agency, manufacturer and government guidelines concerning use and fit of personal protective equipment; and advocate for a change when agency, manufacturer or government guidelines do not meet the infection control requirements regarding appropriate use and fit of personal protective equipment (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2005).

Nurses need to carefully consider their professional role, their duty to provide care and other competing obligations to their own health, to family and to friends. In doing so, they should be clear about steps they might take both in advance of and during an emergency or pandemic situation so that they are prepared for making ethical decisions (Faith, Gibson, Thompson & Upshur, 2005). Value and responsibility statements in the code should support nurses' reflection and actions.

- A. In anticipation of the need for nursing care in a disaster or disease outbreak, nurses:
  - Learn about and provide input into the guidelines the region, province or country has established regarding which persons are to receive priority in care (e.g., priority based on greatest need, priority based on probability of a good outcome, and so on);
  - Learn how support will be provided for those providing care and carrying the physical and moral burden of care;
  - Request and receive regular updates about appropriate safety measures nurses might take to protect and prevent themselves from becoming a victim to a disaster or disease;
  - Assist in developing a fair way to settle conflicts or disputes regarding work exemptions or exemptions from the prophylaxis or vaccination of staff
- B. When in the midst of a disaster or disease outbreak, nurses have an ethical obligation to:
  - Help make the fairest decisions possible about the allocation of resources;
  - Help set priorities in as transparent a manner as possible;
  - Provide safe, compassionate, competent and ethical care (in disasters, as much as circumstances permit);

- Help determine if, when and how nurses may have to decline or withdraw from care; and
- Advocate for the least restrictive measures possible when a person's individual rights must be restricted.

Source: Canadian Nurses Association (2008). Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses. Available from [http://www.cna-aiic.ca/CNA/practice/ethics/code/default\\_e.aspx](http://www.cna-aiic.ca/CNA/practice/ethics/code/default_e.aspx)