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Nursing as a Profession

Nursing Foundation

Characteristics of a profession, professional values, code of ethics, professional conduct, nursing standards and responsibilities of a professional nurse.

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02. NURSING AS A PROFESSION

1. Meaning of Profession

A profession is an occupation requiring specialized education, scientific knowledge, practical competence, ethical standards and accountability.

2. Nursing as a Professional Discipline

Nursing is recognized as a professional discipline because it possesses a specialized body of knowledge, formal education, ethical standards, regulatory requirements and responsibilities towards society.

3. Characteristics of a Profession

- Specialized knowledge.
- Formal professional education.
- Scientific foundation.
- Service orientation.
- Professional autonomy within scope of practice.
- Code of ethics.
- Professional accountability.
- Regulatory oversight.
- Continuing education.
- Professional organizations.

4. Professional Values in Nursing

Value	Meaning
Altruism	Concern for the welfare of others
Autonomy	Respect for informed decision-making
Human dignity	Respect for every individual's worth
Integrity	Honesty and ethical conduct
Social justice	Fair and equitable healthcare
Accountability	Responsibility for professional actions

Compassion	Recognition of suffering and appropriate support

5. Code of Ethics

A nursing code of ethics provides professional guidance for ethical behaviour, patient protection and responsible nursing practice.

ICN Code of Ethics

The International Council of Nurses' 2021 framework contains four major elements:

1. Nurses and patients or other people requiring care.
2. Nurses and practice.
3. Nurses and the profession.
4. Nurses and global health.

Major Ethical Principles

Principle	Meaning
Autonomy	Respecting patient choices
Beneficence	Promoting patient welfare
Non-maleficence	Avoiding preventable harm
Justice	Providing fair and equitable care
Veracity	Communicating truthfully
Fidelity	Keeping professional commitments
Confidentiality	Protecting private information

6. Professional Conduct

A professional nurse should:

- Maintain clinical competence.
- Respect patient rights and privacy.
- Follow institutional policies.
- Maintain professional boundaries.
- Avoid discrimination.
- Report unsafe practices.
- Communicate respectfully.
- Maintain accurate records.
- Accept responsibility for actions.
- Avoid practising beyond authorized competence.

7. Nursing Standards

Nursing standards describe expected levels of professional performance and quality of care.

Standards of Nursing Practice

- Assessment
- Nursing diagnosis
- Outcome identification
- Planning
- Implementation
- Evaluation

Standards of Professional Performance

- Ethics
- Education
- Evidence-based practice
- Quality improvement
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Leadership
- Professional accountability

8. Professional Accountability

Accountability means being answerable for professional decisions, actions and omissions.

Examples include:

- Administering medicines safely.
- Documenting nursing interventions accurately.
- Reporting errors.
- Maintaining patient confidentiality.
- Accepting only responsibilities within one's competence.

9. Responsibility and Authority

Responsibility: Obligation to perform an assigned professional duty.

Authority: Legitimate power to perform or direct authorized activities.

Accountability: Answerability for the decisions and outcomes associated with professional actions.

10. Professional Nursing Organizations

Organization	Function
International Council of Nurses (ICN)	International nursing representation and professional development
Indian Nursing Council (INC)	Historically responsible for uniform standards of nursing education in India; consult current regulatory notifications
State Nursing Registration Councils	Registration and regulatory functions according to applicable frameworks
Trained Nurses' Association of India (TNAI)	Professional welfare and development
Student Nurses' Association (SNA)	Student leadership and professional development

11. Continuing Nursing Education

Continuing nursing education helps nurses update their knowledge, maintain clinical competence and improve professional practice.

Methods include:

- Workshops
- Conferences
- Clinical training
- Simulation
- Seminars
- Online courses
- Research activities

12. Responsibilities of a Professional Nurse

Towards Patients

- Provide safe and individualized care.
- Maintain privacy and dignity.
- Respect informed decisions.
- Protect patients from avoidable harm.

Towards the Profession

- Maintain competence.
- Follow ethical standards.
- Participate in professional development.
- Contribute to quality improvement.

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Towards Society

- Promote public health.
- Provide equitable services.
- Participate in health education.
- Support disease prevention.

Important Examination Questions

1. Explain nursing as a profession.
2. Describe the characteristics of a profession.
3. Discuss professional values and ethical principles.
4. Explain professional accountability.
5. Describe the responsibilities of a professional nurse.

Conclusion

Professional nursing requires scientific knowledge, ethical behaviour, clinical competence and accountability. Professional standards protect patients and maintain the quality and integrity of nursing services.

Quick Revision

- A profession requires specialized education, scientific knowledge, competence, ethical standards and accountability.
- Professional autonomy operates within the nurse's authorized scope of practice.
- Autonomy respects choices; beneficence promotes welfare; non-maleficence avoids preventable harm.
- Justice supports equitable care; veracity means truthfulness; fidelity means keeping commitments.
- Responsibility is an obligation, authority is legitimate power and accountability is answerability.
- Continuing education maintains knowledge, clinical competence and professional practice.

Practice questions

Choose one best answer. The answer key and explanations follow the questions.

1. Which ethical principle means avoiding preventable harm?

A. Veracity
B. Justice
C. Fidelity
D. Non-maleficence

2. Being answerable for professional decisions, actions and omissions is called what?

A. Authority
B. Accountability
C. Autonomy
D. Altruism

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3. Which professional value means concern for the welfare of others?

A. Altruism

B. Integrity

C. Autonomy

D. Social justice

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Answer key and explanations

1. D - Non-maleficence

Non-maleficence means avoiding preventable harm.

2. B - Accountability

Accountability concerns answerability for professional conduct.

3. A - Altruism

Altruism focuses on others' welfare.

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