

Paper Session C2: Ethical Aspects of Clinical Decision-Making

The Integrated Ethically-Driven Environmental Model of Clinical Decision-Making (IEDEM-CD)

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Purpose: To develop an explanatory conceptual model of clinical decision-making in high acuity, high uncertainty nursing environments such as emergency departments.

Background: 119 million patients present to emergency departments each year, each representing multiple clinical decisions made by the emergency nurse at the initial patient encounter. Previous work by this author suggests that using a model of clinical decision-making may be useful to describe the factors and interactions that facilitate and inhibit accuracy in problem identification and thus clinical judgment. The initial determination of patient acuity by the nurse appears to take into account multiple factors extraneous to the patient such as elements particular to the nurse, the patient, and the environment whose interplay is as yet unknown.

Approach: Synthesis of current literature, and a series of observational studies completed in two emergency departments to develop and verify elements within the model.

Major Points and Rationale: The model contains the core elements of knowledge base, critical application and moral agency, immediate elements of unit leadership, nurse-provider relationship and patient acuity, and influential elements of institutional leadership, environment of care and patient volume. The model is an open environmental model with each element potentially influencing the others. The model posits that ethical understanding of the nature of the work of nursing drives a deliberative search for clinical information and positively affects problem identification and clinical judgment. Deficits in moral reasoning negatively affect clinical judgment in a practice environment that is not supportive of good clinical judgment. The nurse possessing a clear understanding of the ethical nature of clinical decision-making will better identify and address patient problems regardless of practice environment.

Conclusions: The targeted education and remediation of nurses may be better served by this conceptual understanding of the contextual nature and the ethical underpinnings of clinical decision-making.