

THE RELEVANCE OF NURSES AND MIDWIVES CODE OF CONDUCT IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Background

Health practitioners are expected to practise and abide by the standards, codes and guidelines established by their profession. As a professional nurse or midwife, knowledge of the code is essential since codes specify the expectations of nurses' responsibilities, legal requirements, behaviour and conduct. In March 2018, the Code of Conduct (CoC) for Nurses was revised and publicised to the profession.

Aim

The aim of the study was to investigate nurses and midwives' perceptions and knowledge about the code and the ways the code was relevant to their everyday work practice.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was deemed a suitable method to numerically examine participants' rating of Importance and Familiarity to the 7 principles in the 2018 iteration of the CoC as well as gather narrative responses to open questions on breaches and relevance to the code. A paper and electronic version of the CoC survey was presented to all fulltime and part-time registered nurses and midwives in January 2018 at a large public hospital in Sydney. 136 participants completed the survey (28% response rate). Descriptive analyses were conducted and these were supported and built upon with a content analysis of the narrative responses.

Results

Professional 'integrity' and clinical conduct resonated with participants when considering the behaviour of nurses, and short, unambiguous values were the most popular. The nurses in this study found the CoC to be important and should form part of nurses and midwives' formal orientation to the organisation.

Conclusion

While local policies govern and direct guidance regarding performance and professional behaviour breaches, further work is needed to support adherence to the Code of Conduct. Inconsistencies with distribution and access to the latest iteration of the CoC were also highlighted in this study.