

NMC Code of Professional Conduct

Many students have told me during my time as Staff Worker for nurses and midwives that in their first lecture as student nurses or midwives they have been told about their professional obligations. Specifically they have been told that whatever their religious, moral or ideological framework for living and making decisions, it has no part of who they are as nurses or midwives. As nurses or midwives they have one authority, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and all other beliefs are to be kept to oneself, and outside the professional arena.

Well first of all, this attitude is not supported by any nursing theory that I have come across, nor is it endorsed by the NMC Code of Professional Conduct. In fact, if any of your lecturers say any thing like this to you, then they are guilty of doing exactly what they are telling you not to – they are bringing into the professional arena their personally held beliefs that you should keep your personal beliefs quiet. Most nursing theories positively affirm the importance of spiritual care as an aspect of human nature, and the Code of Conduct, whilst stipulating that we are not to *discriminate* on the basis of religion, does stress that patients are to be treated as individuals and does not legislate against us talking about our beliefs with them. Indeed, in order to treat someone as an individual I would suggest that one of the things we need to be talking with them about is their world views and beliefs.

However, this article and worksheet is aimed at helping you to understand under what authority we sit as Christians, nurses and midwives, and to help you to gain familiarity with the code of professional conduct as Christians.

Living as God's People in the World

As Christian Nurses & Midwives where is our ultimate source of authority?

- NMC and Christianity

a) We are aliens and strangers in the world, but called to live lives of testimony (*1 Peter 2:11-12*).

Jeremiah 29: 4-10

Jeremiah chapter 29 is a letter written to God's people, who have been exiled from God's land and who are living amongst, and under the rule of, foreign nations (1). From verses 10-14 we can see that this is not their home, not where they belong and not where they are ultimately headed; yet in verses 4-7 we read of God's instructions to them to go about the process of normal daily life. They are to work hard, to seek the good of the land they are in, to marry and have families – but not to forget who they are; this is not their permanent home.

This illustrates the point being made in 1 Peter 11-12, when Peter reminds Christians that they are aliens and strangers in the world – it is not our home, it is not where we belong or

where we are headed. Nevertheless we are called to live out our lives in this place, lives that will bear witness to the glory of God – we are not to forget who we are.

As Christian nurses and midwives we can get along with the business of learning to be nurses and midwives, and also to seeking to enhance the good standing and reputation of our profession – as long as we remember that we are Christians first and nurses / midwives second. The fact that we are Christians should shape the way we practice as professionals.

b) We are called to be obedient to secular authorities (*1 Peter 2:13-15; Romans 13:1-7*)

Daniel 1:1-7

Daniel and his friends were amongst those exiles from Babylonian conquests taken to the royal court of Babylon and instructed in their new culture and language. They obeyed and learnt all the things they were called to learn, even to the point of adopting new names. There were a couple of issues on which they asked for conscientious objection, but on the whole they were obedient to their new authority.

This illustrates well the point being made in 1 Peter 2:13-15, and again in Romans 13:1-7, where secular authorities are shown to have been ultimately established by God, having power that comes from him, and therefore calling for obedience from all subjects.

As Christian nurses and midwives therefore, the NMC has been established by God as our professional authority and we are called to be obedient, since in obeying them we demonstrate our obedience to God. We are blessed that in the same way that Daniel applied for conscientious objection, so too can we on some issues.

c) We are called to obey God first and foremost (*Acts 4:18-20; 5:29*)

Daniel 6:6-16

As we saw above, Daniel was perfectly ready to obey the ruling authorities – until such point as they called for him to do something that would anger God. At this point Daniel didn't hide his faith or actions. Instead he refused to worship any thing as god other than the God of Israel and therefore faced punishment from the authorities for his disobedience and prayed to God for help.

This illustrates the point being made by the Apostles in Acts 4:18-20 and 5:29, where Peter indicates that if on some point the law of God conflicts with the law of men, then our first loyalty is to God.

As Christian nurses and midwives we need to be aware of exactly what our Christian responsibilities are so that we may be faithful to God. If our lecturers tell us we cannot talk to our patients about Jesus, then we need to obey God rather than men, for we cannot help speaking about what we know to be true.

From the passages outlined above, can you summarise what you think our authority structure is? Try to relate this practically to the situations you have found yourself in on placement or in lectures. Does this mean there are situations where you should have made a firmer stance as a Christian? Are there situations that were causing you anxiety as a Christian that you now feel more comfortable about?

Code of Professional Conduct

As Christian nurses and midwives, is the Code of Professional Conduct for us or against us?

- What Christian principles does it embody?

For example:

Servant-heartedness	Clause 1	<i>Mk 10:45</i>
Concern for interests of others	Clause 1&4	<i>Phil 2:4</i>
Values the Individual	Clause 2	<i>1Cor 13:12; Rom 2:6, Psalm 139:13</i>
Objectively For another	Clause 2	<i>Psalm 118:6, Psalm 117</i>
Individual responsibility & Choice	Clause 3	<i>Deut 30:19-20, Jn 3:36</i>
Team work	Clause 4	<i>Gal 6:2, 2 Cor 12:20</i>
Not to discriminate	Clause 4, 7&2	<i>Rom 2:11, Rom 10:12; Jn 3:16</i>
Guard your Tongue	Clause 5	<i>James 3:5-6 Prov 21:23</i>
Trustworthiness & honesty	Clause 7	<i>James 1:27; Gal 5:14, Phil 4:8</i>
Protection of the vulnerable	Clause 8, 2&3	<i>James 1:27</i>

- How might you seek to be serving your patients as Christians in some of the ways listed above as you go about your normal duties?
- Does the Code of Professional Conduct make any demands that are contrary to Christianity?
- Where might our colleagues use the Code of Professional Conduct against us?
Clauses you might like to look at are:

2.1

You might need to defend your approach to spiritual care bearing in mind the 'limits of professional practice, resources and the goals of the therapeutic relationship'

2.2

Colleagues might try to suggest unfair discrimination on religious grounds

4.2

Again colleagues might suggest that you are being discriminatory on religious grounds

7.1, 7.2, 7.3

Although the gospel is not a commercial product your colleagues might suggest that you are taking advantage of patients whilst they are vulnerable, and abusing your authority to sell them an ideology.

8.1, 8.2

Colleagues might question your conduct and the ethics of a Christian focused practice

Remember, forewarned is forearmed. If you know where your colleagues are likely to question your professional practice you will know how to answer them. However, as I hope these exercises will have shown you, the Code of Professional Conduct is a lot more supportive of a Christian approach to nursing and midwifery than we might be led to believe.

Why not get together with some friends and work through some of the Code of Conduct scenarios outlined elsewhere on the website? Work out how far you would be supported by the Code of Conduct for having an explicitly Christian approach to some of the situations, or work through your own real life situations on the same basis.

You might also like to check out the articles and work sheets on witnessing, which take another perspective on the NMC Code of Professional Conduct.