THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR NURSES AND NURSE ASSISTANTS OF SLOVENIA

At the sixteenth annual meeting held on 17 February 2005 the Nurses and Midwives Association of Slovenia adopted the revised Code of Ethics for Nurses and Nurse Assistants of Slovenia.

The Code of Ethics for Nurses and Nurse Assistants of Slovenia applies to all nurses and other members in the nursing team.

Terms used in the Code of Ethics for Nurses and Nurse Assistants of Slovenia:

- **The nurse** refers to the following professions: State Enrolled Nurses (SENs), Charge Nurses, Registered Nurses, teachers of Health Education and other nurses with tertiary qualifications;
- **The patient** is any person, healthy or ill, who enters the health care system as defined by WHO.

The above terms refer to both genders.

PREAMBLE

“The fundamental responsibilities of nurses are to promote health, to prevent illness, to restore health and to alleviate suffering. Inherent in nursing is respect for human rights, especially the right to life and human dignity.”  

*the ICN Code of Ethics, 2000*

Nurses have a significant influence on people's health and their lives. In this way, nurses assume a great responsibility that cannot be defined by means of laws and regulations alone. Here, personal ethics arising from an individual's moral values play an important part.
The purpose of the Code of Ethics is to assist nurses to shape their own ethical values. It provides guidance and encouragement to those working in the field of nursing care.

The nurse advocates the needs of their patients and offers them physical, mental, social, spiritual and moral support.

The Code of Ethics is intended for all nurses and their colleagues in the nursing team. For students of nursing the Code of Ethics should serve as a source of knowledge and reflexion and should provide support in the formation of their own ethical and moral convictions. To a practising nurse it should serve as the base for ethical judgement of their work.

Respect and development of humane values of this occupation ensure nurses’ personal growth and contentment at work.

NURSES AND PATIENTS
PRINCIPLE I

The nurse preserves the life and health of people. The nurse must perform their duties in a humane, professional and responsible manner and respect the patient’s individual habits, needs and values.

Standards:

- Race, religious beliefs, nationality, social status, gender, age, health status and political convictions must not influence the relationship with the patient.
- Individual programmes of nursing care call for a holistic approach to the individual, the family and the community. They include physical, mental, social and spiritual needs of the patient and respect the patient's culture and personal convictions.
The nurse's relationship with the patient should include co-operation with their family members and significant others.

PRINCIPLE II

The nurse respects the patient's right to choose and make decisions.

Standards:

- The nurse is an advocate of the patient and their rights.
- The nurse divulges the truth to the patient in a clear and tactful manner.
- The choice of a nursing care programme is preconditioned by the patient's consent.
- The consent is a process which actively includes the patient who has the right to accept or reject the procedures of nursing care.
- In obtaining the patient's consent the nurse must not abuse her status, use constraint or mislead; the nurse – patient relationship should be like a partnership.
- The nurse assesses the patient's autonomy when the illness or other factors temporarily or permanently inhibit their ability to make decisions. The nurse offers the patient the right to choose to the best of the patient’s ability. The nurse helps the patient maintain or regain the highest possible degree of autonomy.
- When the patient’s enquiries relate to issues unrelated to nursing care, the nurse refers the patient to an appropriate expert.
- In accordance with the holistic approach to patients, the nurse respects their choices also in regards to complementary and natural medicine.

PRINCIPLE III

In accordance with professional secrecy, the nurse must hold in confidence personal information about the patient's health condition and the reasons, circumstances and consequences of such condition.
Standards:

- Professional secrecy includes all information about the patient and their personal, family and social matters that the nurse obtains on the job as well as all information regarding nursing care, diagnosis of disease, treatment, monitoring of health condition and rehabilitation.
- The nurse must not disclose any personal information to the patient's family members and significant others if such is the patient's wish. This also holds for the patient's death.
- The nurse can be released from professional secrecy only by the patient or the court. For underage children and children in foster care only the parents or foster parents can release the nurse from professional secrecy.
- The nurse has the authority to disclose information about the patient's state of health from the perspective of nursing care.
- It is the duty of a health institution to implement a suitable system for maintaining records ensuring the confidentiality of the patient's information.

Restrictions:

- The nurse is not morally obliged to abide by professional secrecy in a case where doing so would result in putting the patient, the family or the community at risk. If it is necessary to disclose personal information, the nurse should only inform those who could, to her good judgement, prevent the harmful consequences arising from the lack of information.

**PRINCIPLE IV**

The nurse respects the dignity and privacy of the patient in any health state, illness and when dying.

Standards:

- The nurse must perform her job in a way that includes the patient as a unique and irreplaceable person with all their characteristics.
- The nurse takes into consideration and respects the patient's right to privacy, especially when it is a question of the patient's intimacy, fear, suffering or pain.
- The nurse provides a dying patient with high quality nursing care, an accepting attitude, the possibility to practise their religious beliefs and a feeling of safety. She also alleviates suffering and ensures a peaceful and dignified death.
- The nurse gives special attention and offers help to the relatives of the dying patient or the deceased and the patient's significant others.

PRINCIPLE V

The nurse provides the patient with comprehensive nursing care.

Standards:
- In their professional practice, the nurse is independent and autonomous and has a responsibility to their own conscience, their patients and society.
- The nurse is authorised to make decisions, plans and to supervise nursing care. She reports to the head of the nursing team.
- The nurse bears personal responsibility and accountability for maintaining competence by continual professional development.
- The nurse is obliged to share her professional knowledge with everyone on the nursing team.
- The nurse encourages the advancement of nursing care. They are active in developing a core of research-based professional knowledge and implementing this in their practice.
- The nurse is co-responsible for people's health and lives and is therefore obliged to promote health.
- The nurse must not refuse to give urgent medical care in accordance with professional qualifications, regardless of whether or not specifically asked for help.
- The nurse does not perform procedures for which they are not qualified and experienced.
The nurse must be able to work under extreme pressure whilst being aware of moral and human responsibility.

Restrictions

- The nurse can only refuse to act if they feel that it does not agree with their conscience and the international code of medical ethics.
- Regarding the above, the nurse must notify the medical institution, which takes this into account and ensures that patients are asserted their health care rights.
- The nurse must not betray the patient's trust by obtaining the patient's personal property.
- The nurse refuses a gift, a favour, hospitality and commercial interests when these are intended to benefit the nurse or the patient in an unacceptable way.

**PRINCIPLE VI**

**The nurse's actions are based on making decisions which benefit the patient.**

Standards:

- The nurse strives towards working conditions that ensure nursing care is in accordance with the values and standards of this Code of Ethics.
- The nurse adheres to the principles of professional conduct and refuses any procedure that could, in their professional and ethical opinion and to their conscience, be unethical and harmful for the patient.
- The nurse's actions must be based on decisions that promote, maintain and restore health and alleviate suffering.
- The nurse – patient relationship must not be conditioned with the intention of personal gain.
- The head nurse promotes a system of organisation that ensures the best possible nursing care and protects the patient from unprofessional, unethical and selfish behaviour of the nursing team.
- The nurse helps the nursing team to solve ethical dilemmas and make ethical decisions.
- The nurse involved in training ensures that professional placement with patients is performed professionally and ethically.
- The nurse – mentor ensures that students are familiar with the Code of Ethics, understand it and act accordingly.

NURSES AND CO-WORKERS

PRINCIPLE VII

Health care of the patient should be a joined effort of experts from different medical fields: the nurse is aware of different professions and cherishes and respects the work of her colleagues.

Standards:
- Collaboration between nurses and other medical workers should be a partnership where an individual is greatly respected.
- Comradeship and professional duty bind the nurse to help other nurses when asked.
- The nurse acknowledges the professional and life experience of older nurses.
- The nurse offers younger colleagues professional, personal and career growth.
- The nurse takes special care of students from nursing schools and faculties and graduates.
- The nurse sustains good interpersonal relations with other colleagues.
- The nurse reports unprofessional and unethical behaviour to the Nurses and Midwives Association of Slovenia
- The nurse promotes a friendly and non-violent working environment and fosters professional solidarity.
- The nurse works and acts in accordance with the “Image of the Nurse” document.

**NURSES AND SOCIETY**

**PRINCIPLE VIII**

The nurse acts according to guidelines that ensure better health and development of health care.

Standards:

- The nurse, together with other health workers and citizens, participates in the planning and implementation of health care programmes.
- The nurse initiates and supports activities for the benefit of the general public.
- The nurse has the right and duty to promote recognisability and the good reputation of nursing care in society, suitable working conditions, suitable pay and legal aid through their own professional and other organizations.
- The nurse sustains a safe and healthy environment.
- The nurse supports a healthy lifestyle of individuals, groups and local communities.

**NURSES AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

**PRINCIPLE IX**

Professional organisations of nurses assume the responsibility to observe and advance ethical principles in nursing care.

Standards:
Professional organisations of nurses actively support and advance training on ethical views in nursing care which should be available to all nurses.

With ethical and moral conduct the nurse contributes to a better reputation of the nursing profession and professional organisations in society.

THE IMAGE OF THE NURSE

A nurse is a person who has completed at least twelve years of general and/or vocational schooling, has completed tertiary education in the field of nursing care and has been given permission to work independently in health care by a relevant authority. They are qualified to work in nursing care, health education, work management and research.

Nursing care can independently be practised by people with the following qualifications: SENs, health technicians, charge nurses, teachers of health education, qualified midwives and other nurses with tertiary qualifications.

A nurse works in nursing care, which is an integral part of the health care system in any society. A nurse practises nursing care as defined by the International Council of Nurses (ICN): “Nursing encompasses the autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. Nursing includes the promotion of health, the prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health systems management, and education are also key nursing roles.”

A nurse is a qualified professional who approaches individuals and groups holistically, autonomously takes on duties and responsibilities within the health care system, welfare and education. A nurse is an independent professional working in the nursing team, and is an active member of the medical team which looks after the patient’s health. A nurse promotes respect, tolerance, understanding and good interpersonal relations at the workplace, as these form the basis for high quality, successful and productive work and are necessary for the personal contentment of an individual, a group or an institution.
A person, healthy or well, (patient, protégé, user, client…) is in the centre of the nurse’s activity, being unique in time and space; the patient is at the top in the nurse’s value system. The nurse’s actions radiate a holistic care for an individual whose interests they put before their own. The ability to experience and understand a person in its totality as a physical, mental, spiritual and social being is matched with knowledge, experience and the skill to continuously adjust and change their positive attitude towards themselves, others and the environment.

One of the values of nursing care is knowledge, which is why the nurse always encourages other professionals to gain further knowledge and skills, professional development and personal and professional growth. The nurse takes part in and encourages research and works on research projects.

The image of the nurse is comprised of two equally significant parts: personal image and specific professional characteristics.

- The basic condition for the personal image of the nurse is physical, mental, spiritual and social maturity. Similarly, the ability to co-exist successfully, humanely and empathetically are equally important. The personal image includes the nurse’s basic human characteristics like philanthropy, well-meaning, optimism, respect, tolerance and the like. Professional characteristics of the nurse are based on basic human characteristics.

- Skills, affiliation with their own profession, independence, friendliness, understanding, acceptance, consistency, tolerance, calmness, trust and the like are specific professional characteristics, which are manifested in the nurse’s work with the patient.

The nurse respects basic human values, which enables them to do their job well. They should follow the moral teaching, “Do not do unto others as you would expect they should do unto you.”
Health is a particularly important value; maintaining health is the duty and responsibility of the nurse and to others, and it should be their intention to act accordingly.

The nurse represents the nursing profession first and foremost with their self-image (identity) of which the professional image is part. Suitable appearance and behaviour are at the core of the nurse’s autonomy, a sign of self-awareness, and reflect the attitude towards their occupation, other people, position and institution. The nurse should be aware that every inappropriate, reckless, dishonourable and humiliating action not only hurts the patients but also others working in the same profession.

The line between the personal and professional life of the nurse is not easily identifiable due to the expectations of society, which expects the nurse to help also outside her working hours.

For personal growth, advancement of nursing and to be better informed, the nurse can voluntarily join organisations (regional associations, nursing syndicates, professional sections, non-government, political, humanitarian and other organisations and associations) in order to encourage the establishment of nursing associations, strengthen feelings of solidarity and influence current events at home and abroad.

The nurse is bound by the Code of Ethics for Nurses and Nurse Assistants of Slovenia.

Ljubljana, 17th February 2005