

Abstract – ICMM 44th World Congress, Brussels

Summary:

The role of the military nurse on operations is changing. Due to a combination of the unfamiliar situations and environments encountered in combat and humanitarian operations, advances in practice and a shortage of front-line doctors, military nurses are likely to become more involved in complex clinical ethical decision-making in military treatment facilities (MTF). This presentation will discuss the author's PhD study, which aims to examine the personal ethical decision-making experience of military nurses who have deployed in MTFs.

Methods:

This exploratory qualitative study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology. 31 participants were interviewed to explore their lived experience. Line-by-line analysis of data was undertaken. Careful attention was paid to hermeneutic (interpretive) aspects, while maintaining an idiographic focus on the depth of detail and analysis in context to preserve academic rigour.

Results:

Initial findings show that all participants agree that **ethical decision-making is important in nursing**, but opinion is divided as to whose responsibility it is to make those ethical decisions. Every participant has experienced issues with **international working**, and the differences in practice / approach to care / ethical outlook. **Written guidelines** were generally described as not nearly as important as relying on an individual's own 'moral architecture'. **Moral courage** to highlight bad practice or poor decision-making is another emerging theme. **Cultural differences** were cited as a cause of significant ethical tension and moral injury. **Pre-deployment training** has evolved significantly over time from none at all to advanced education and case-based scenarios with realistic moulage. **Classic ethical theories and ethical tensions** and their effect on decision-making can be seen in all interviews.

Conclusions:

Although data analysis is not yet complete, there is a compelling argument for case-based learning as the optimal solution for nurses likely to encounter ethical dilemmas in operational deployed practice. Ethical decision-making is clearly important to military nurses, yet only a minority appear to have been involved in the process. Further work is needed to develop a culture of ethical awareness and education across UK military nursing.