

Researching Empirical Bioethics by Nursing

José María Galán González-Serna*

University Nursing Center San Juan de Dios, Sevilla University, Spain

*Corresponding author: José María Galán González-Serna, University Nursing Center San Juan de Dios, Sevilla University, Spain; E-mail: josemaria.galan@sjd.es

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Bioethics is -the systematic study of human behavior in the field of life sciences and health care, to the extent that such behavior is examined in the light of moral principles and values [1]. Bioethics requires research on two of its main objectives: “the ethical search applied to the questions raised by biomedical progress” and “the interdisciplinary study of the set of conditions that requires responsible management of human life (or of the human person) within the framework of the rapid and complex progress of knowledge and biomedical technologies” [2].

Bioethics research on issues related to life and health care requires theoretical reflection and an empirical analysis of reality. The method of Bioethics is fundamentally the interdisciplinary dialogue in which various disciplines such as philosophy, theology, law, health sciences and social sciences must intervene. What can and should Nursing contribute to this interdisciplinary dialogue?

Today, the need to harmonize bioethical reflection with the results of the empirical social sciences is defined, defined as those disciplines that describe and predict the behavior of individuals and groups and aspire to formulate general principles of causality [3]. Empirical Bioethics serves to increase the sensitivity of bioethics to the concrete context of action [4].

Empirical bioethics would serve for the elaboration of ethical judgment in several ways [5]:

a) analyzing the ethical conduct of a certain group of people with respect to ethics in a field of special ethical relevance. These studies would verify or not the vital use of certain ethical principles and analyze if in certain contexts there are variations in the application of these principles; b) identifying ethical issues that escape a mere observation and that are relevant in a specific context; c) describing the opinions and patterns of ethical behavior before a specific biomedical practice, as well as those ethical actions that are relevant to modify a normative argument; d) showing how scientific data can modify various decisions in the bioethical field.

According to the International Code of Ethics for Nurses of the International Council of Nurses (CIE) “Nurses have four fundamental duties: promoting health, preventing disease, restoring health and alleviating suffering. The need for nursing is universal. Nursing is inherent in respect for human rights, including cultural rights, the right to life and to free choice, to dignity and to be treated with respect. In nursing care there is respect and there are no restrictions regarding considerations of age, color, creed, culture, disability or illness, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, political opinions, race or social status”. The nurse is close to people and the new challenges that technology and the progressive recognition of new health human rights pose to the clinical-care relationship and health systems.

Clinical ethics in nursing take into account how to deal with particular cases, particular patients and particular conditions, so that the major principles, norms and philosophical foundations can be applied in these circumstances. This task requires research and the Nurse is located in a privileged position close to the specific patient, so from the beneficent function and advocacy of the rights of the people, to whom the nurse attends, can and should contribute to the particular knowledge and generalizable of the ethical issues.

Ethics has to inquire about beliefs, values, ideals, options, justification of options, in specific cases. The strength of empirical research in bioethics is that it allows for [6]:

- The description of the experience of individuals or populations with respect to morally relevant issues;
- The description of the attitudes, beliefs, moral opinions, reasoning patterns and decision-making of those involved in a certain practice;
- The generation of data which can challenge authority, dogma, convention, norms and experience by showing how practice varies; and
- The identification of moral issues that have escaped the attention of ethicists, but are relevant in a specific context, including those that are not obvious because they are embedded in practice.

Thus, empirical research may enrich normative arguments [7] and make ethical discourse more context sensitive and comprehensive. This, in turn, may inform moral discourses and the formulation of policy, regulation and legislation [8,9].

Moral sensitivity affects whether and how we see others, note moral concerns, respond with delicacy, and navigate complex social interactions [10]. The Nurse, using empathy to increase moral sensitivity, is able to access the emotional, evaluative and credential dimensions that mobilize and decide the wishes of patients, guiding their ethical behavior.

Therefore, it is important that nurses initiate, support and participate in research studies on empirical bioethics for the benefit of the people they serve and through them throughout the society.

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