Perspectives on Clinical Ethics Support and Ethically Difficult Situations: Reflections and Experiences

av

DARA RASOAL

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Avdelningen för Omvårdnad, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall

Örebro universitet
Institutionen för Hälsovetenskap och Medicine, Örebro universitet, 701 82 ÖREBRO
Abstract

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Healthcare personnel encounter ethically difficult situations in their everyday work and clinical ethics support might be important to support healthcare personnel to deal with these situations. The overall aim of this thesis was to describe perspectives on clinical ethics support, experiences of being in ethically difficult situations and experiences of facilitating ethics reflection. Methods. Study I had a descriptive design in which research articles were reviewed (n=54). In study II audio-recorded moral case deliberation (n=70) in 10 Swedish workplaces in hospitals and community care were analysed. In study III interviews were conducted with facilitators (n=11) of moral case deliberation. Study IV used non-participant observation during three weeks as well as informal conversations with healthcare personnel (n=12) in community home healthcare. Results and conclusion. In study I, two perspectives emerged on clinical ethics support, a “Top-down” perspective, where an individual or a group of “experts” in ethics could recommend the best course of action and a “Bottom-up” perspective that allows healthcare personnel to manage ethically difficult situations through ethical reflections led by a facilitator. Studies II and IV showed how ethically difficult situations on different levels are often connected with emotions and uncertainties. Study III showed the role of the facilitator to be fundamental in creating a space for self-reflection among healthcare personnel. Study IV showed that healthcare personnel face complex demands and expectations from the healthcare organization regarding the provision of care as well as having to meet the needs of patients and their next-of-kin. To conclude, healthcare personnel needed to find a balance among demands and expectations in order to satisfy those stakeholders involved and they had to seek compromise. There is a need for clinical ethics support that helps healthcare personnel reflect individually and collectively on ethically difficult situations they encounter in their everyday clinical practice. From this standpoint, a “Bottom-up” perspective may reduce the risk of moral distress among healthcare personnel and promote care based on person-centred values.

Keywords: clinical ethics support, difficult situations, healthcare personnel, facilitators, healthcare sector.

Dara Rasoal, School of Health and Medical Sciences, Örebro University, SE-701 82 Örebro, Sweden, dara.rasoal@oru.se