The Behaviors of Ethical Leadership of Division Head Nurses at Advanced Hospitals Under Ministry of Public Health: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To examine the ethical leadership behaviors among division head nurses in advanced hospitals under Ministry of Public Health.

Method: A qualitative study with Delphi technique was used to collect data. The participants consisted of 12 administrators who have obtained ethical awards or published ethical research and 17 experts on the ethical issue. The data was generated from open-ended interviews and the questionnaires related to division head nurse's ethical leadership. The content validity was 0.84. The index of item-objective congruence was 0.57 to 1.00.

Result: The behaviors of head nurses' ethical leadership included 57 items. Thirteen dimensions were established including: caring, responsibility, honesty, managing fairness, integrity, advocacy, consciousness, sacrifice, friendly interpersonal relationship, ethical communication, reinforcement, ethical decision - making, and ethical organization climate.

Conclusion: This study demonstrated behaviors related ethical leadership which will be an enable the ethical leadership training for division head nurses, and can be applied in providing guidelines to enhance the ethical leadership competencies of division head nurses.

***Keywords:** Ethical leadership, Leadership behavior, Leadership, Division head nurses*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the behavior and characteristic that leaders expressed which leaders influence people by creating power, motivating compliance, and impaction the organization outcomes.[1] In modern society, the important competency of leadership not only has high skills of management but also ethical leadership, which are needed to achieve the organization's goal. Several studies claimed that the behaviors of ethical leadership were demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions, and interpersonal relationships

promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision- making to achieve the organization's goal.[2,3]

The division head nurses have crucial roles in the nursing organization in terms of management and delivery the policies from the nursing department to nursing units through the nursing division. Therefore the position of division head nurses requires that individuals who hold an ethic, and being a role model.[4] From a literature review during 2005-2015 revealed that the ethical leadership studies have been studies in the business and education field, such as Manyat[5] found that ethical organizational culture and ethical organizational climate were factors affecting ethical leadership of school administrators. There were only few studies in the nursing field such as an ethnography meta-analysis qualitative research by

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Makaroff et al[6] revealed that ethical leadership in nursing was being responsive to practitioners and providing support for increasing the capacity of ethical issues in the day-to-day work. Prichayudh and Oumtanee [7] studied the experience of Buddhist leadership in head nurses and found that the head nurses who applied the Buddhist path not only in their life but also integrated into their working life as a nursing administrator and taking care of nurses in the organization. Jantawong et al [8] focused on the factors of ethical decision-making behavior of head nurses; findings demonstrated that head nurses rated their decision-making behaviors at the high level, and the working environment factor significantly influenced ethical decision-making behavior of head nurses ($p <$ .05). From the gaps of the previous studies, the aim of this study was to examine the ethical leadership behaviors among division head nurses in advanced hospitals under the Ministry of Public Health.

METHOD

A qualitative method with purposive sampling Delphi technique was used in this study. The participants of in-depth interview consisted of 12 nursing administrators who have obtained ethical awards or published ethical research; and 17 experts in ethical issue [9] for a Delphi technique.

Research instruments: The process of research instrument development divided into three phases:

Phase 1 Developing instrument: The researcher created interview guide based on literature review and the conceptual framework of Brown et al. [2]

Phase 2 Developing the questionnaire: The researcher developed the 59 items, five -rating scales questionnaires based on key informants. The questionnaires were approved by seven experts in the ethical field. The content validity was 0.84. The index of item-objective congruence ranged from 0.57 to 1.00.

Phase 3 Structure of the ethical leadership questionnaires: The initial contribution from the ethical experts was collected in the form of answers to questionnaires and their comments to these answers.

Data collection: The data was collected by an in-depth interview using semi - structure questionnaires from February 2017 – April 2017. The data collection was divided into three parts including; prior, during, and completion of the interview.[10]The seven semi-structured questions of in-depth interviews as following:

1. How the division of head nurses presented the ethical leadership behaviors?

2. What are the potential ethical leadership behaviors of division head nurses?

3. What are the appropriately ethical leadership behaviors of division head nurses according to social norm?

4. How is the ethical leadership of division head nurses promotion of such conduct to followers through communication to express themselves in the way of the leader?

5. How are the division head nurses to empower subordinates?

6. How the division head nurses is making decisions about ethical practice?

7. What other expressions of ethical leadership behaviors of division head nurses are there?

Data analysis: Data analysis from the interviews was analyzed by content analysis following Strauss and Corbin[11] and the data analysis of Delphi technique was as follows.[12]:

Step 1 Round One Delphi study. The researcher asked general questions to gain a broad understanding of the 17 experts view on ethical leadership. The 58 – questionnaires were collated and summarized the responses. Only one question was extracted because it was irrelevant content to ethical leadership behaviors.

Step 2 Round Two Delphi study. Based on the first round, there was no question was extracted that 57 - questionnaires with interquartile range (IQR) of ≤ 1.50.

Step 3 Final round Delphi study. Based on the results from the second round, the 17 experts confirmed the accuracy and relevancy of the panel of experts agreed with 57 ethical leadership questions.

Research Findings

The findings revealed that the ethical leadership behaviors in division head nurses consist of 13 dimensions with 57 items, the dimensional quotes as following:

Caring demonstrated by showing of kindness, concerning, taking care, and helping subordinate both working and personal life as quoted that "The division head nurses should have cared for subordinates by helping them to solve problems including health problems, family problems, or working problems."

Responsibility demonstrated by having a duty to complete a task, showing responsibility to the results even if an error occurs, and putting the right man on the right job as quoted that "The division head nurses have to have a responsibility to their tasks and their subordinate's task, not get off when the task is failed."

Honesty demonstrated by being on time, being straightforward behaviors consistent with actions, verbalization, and thinking, and no corruption as quoted that "The division head nurses have to have honesty, including no cheating working time, working on time, no hidden agendas or corruption, concerning the organization benefit, and carrying out straightforward."

Managing fairness demonstrated by equality, justification, and following the rules as quoted that "The division head nurses have to show neutral behavior, reasonable and equality such as assign subordinate for training, the division head nurse should consider the fairness."

Integrity demonstrated by being a good role model, behaving ethical behaviors both in professional and personal life, and respect the other as quoted that "Ethical leaders should be a good role model and do not have personal issue that may disturb the task."

Advocacy demonstrated by protection the others, and concerning the human right of subordinates in an appropriate way as quoted that "The division head nurses have to promote the right of a subordinate in terms of received health check-up every year, and working in the good circumstance."

Consciousness demonstrated by showing knowledge, concentrating on the present, and being consciousness all the time as quoted that "The division head nurses have to concentrate on their jobs, focus on the present and keep concentrate whether speaking or acting."

Sacrifice demonstrated devote to the job, and do not expect anything to return as quoted that "The division head nurses have to sacrifice to the job when the members of nursing teams were less than the number of patients and sometimes working on the weekend."

Friendly interpersonal relationship demonstrated by making friends with subordinates as their family, having a good relationship, and caring the feeling of subordinates as quoted that "The division head nurses have to show their respect, friendly, no harm to subordinates. Moreover, ready to develop the organization with subordinates."

Ethical communication demonstrated by giving direct communication, having reasonable, making two-way communication, having a chance for subordinates to show their opinion, and being deep listen and understand correctly as quoted that "The ethical leadership should have two-way communication by understanding clearly, speaking clearly and fact."

Reinforcement demonstrated by building motivation, and encouraging subordinates to have a chance to enhance ethical and nursing knowledge as quoted that "The reinforcement is very crucial for subordinates in term of contributing their power."

Ethical decision-making demonstrated by making a decision based on reasonable and being neutral, and doing based on evidence-based as quoted that "The division head nurses must have a decision making based on the studies, unbiased and fairness."

Ethical organizational climate demonstrated by promoting the policies to support activities in the organization, meeting and sharing the ethical knowledge with all members, having happiness in the work place as quoted that "The division head nurses have to develop the ethical policies in order to promote ethics knowledge to members, concerning about justice, and doing the right thing continuing through all members"

The Categories of Ethical Leadership Behaviors

This section demonstrated the categories of each ethical leadership behavior of division head nurses with Mean and inter-quartile range as following:

Firstly, caring was willing to help others, asking subordinates regarding problems at work and personal life, un-ignoring, and listening to subordinates (Mean=4.80, IQR = 1.00). Responsibility was showing responsibility of own works including mistakes, and assigning tasks depending on ability (Mean=4.75, IQR=0.63). Honesty was being a role model for working on time, following on a promise to subordinates, works with honesty, and

management team with transparency (Mean=4.50, IQR=0.88). Managing fairness was listening without judgment, righteousness, giving an opportunity, and considering the merit with the standard criteria (Mean=5.00, IQR=0.80). Integrity was being a good role model for works and personal life, respect individuality, and politeness (Mean =4.40, IQR=0.70). Advocacy was debating when subordinate received works that are not relate to nursing tasks, protecting subordinate when they were accuse without faults, recommendation the use of current welfare and claim advocacy for subordinates (Mean =4.00, IQR=0.75). Consciousness was thinking carefully, working with caution, focusing, controlling self-control (Mean=4.50, IQR=1.00). Sacrifice was coordinating and assisting the subordinates to perform urgent tasks in a timely manner, willing to sacrifice personal time to participate in professional activities and extraordinary activities (Mean =4.25, IQR=0.63). Interpersonal relationship was treat subordinates as a family, good relationships with subordinates, and sensitive to the expression of subordinates (Mean=4.67, IQR=1.00). Ethical communication was providing useful information, being appropriate communication, giving a chance to speak out other opinions based on reasonable ideas without argument (Mean = 4.40, IQR=0.90). Reinforcement was giving positive reinforcements, supporting subordinates to ethical advancement, being a consultant in ethical practice, coaching, promoting ethical practice and research skills (Mean=5.00, IQR=0.90). Ethical decision- making was searching information to support decision-making, clarifying decision, decisions making based on justice and evidence based (Mean=5.00, IQR=0.60). Ethical organizational climate was creating policy regarding ethical activities, setting road map concerning ethical standard of a hospital, clarifying ethical issues with subordinates, setting ethical meeting, and supporting happy workplace (Mean=4.80, IQR=1.00).

DISCUSSION

This qualitative research was conducted with Delphi technique to generate new insight of the ethical leadership behaviors of division head nurses. The findings revealed that the 13 behaviors of division head nurses' ethical leadership. The number of component discovered differs from previous studies in the service, and education context abroad. Makaroff, et al[6] found that two components of ethical nursing leadership must be responsive to practitioners and to the contextual

system in which they and formal nurse leaders work, required receiving and providing support to increase the capacity to practice and discuss ethics in the day-to-day. Also Kar[14] suggestion ethical leadership had four components including values, vision, voice, and virtue, and Manyat[5] found that ethical leadership of education administration study had 10 components of honest, commitment, accountability, organizational culture, ethical organizational climate, and vision etc.

For the details of each ethical leadership behavior, **caring** behaviors were expressed by kindness, helping subordinates both in professional and personal issues were similar to the study from Brown, et al,[2] and Palsarn.[15] **Responsibility** was to responsible for their duties consistent[5,15] and the responsibility were expressed assign work to the right person similar to the study from Prichayudh and Oumtanee.[7] **Sacrifice** was similar to Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council[16] which stated that nursing administration should have ethical behaviors which pay attention to the benefits of the organization more than his or herself. **Advocacy** referred to protection of the right of subordinates that similar to Fry and Johnston's study.[17] **Integrity** referred to being a good role model for subordinates both professional work and personal life related to Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council[16] indicated that administrator should work with morality, virtue, and according to the expectations of society and professional ethics. **Honesty** was consistent with Brown, et al.[2,3] and the honesty behaviors including being on time, no hidden agenda at work, and no corruption.[15,18] **Managing fairness** was similar to Brown, et al [2,3] stated that the administration was managing fairness and equity.[5,7,15] **Consciousness** was similar to the study of Prichayudh and Oumtane[7] referred to being conscious of self and concentration to the present. **Ethical communication** was similar to Palsarn[15] that indicated two-way and open-minded communication. **Friendly interpersonal relationship** was relationship in consideration of subordinate's mind which was similar to Palsarn's study.[15] **Ethical decision making** referred to making rational decision making based on evidence and neutral, and **reinforcement** was positive reinforcement, reward, and recognition to subordinates; both categories were similar study by Brown, et al[2] that consistent with Brown, et al.[2] **Ethical organizational climate** was put in the Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council policy,[16] Manyat[5] also conducted it as formulating policies, virtuous activities.[7]

CONCLUSION AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

This research study revealed the new body of knowledge concerning the ethical leadership behaviors of division head nurses consisted of 13 dimensions and 57 items. These findings can be applied in providing guidelines to enhance the ethical leadership competencies of division head nurses. The practical implications for nursing administration is that the ethical leadership instrument can be developed based on these research findings and be used as guideline for training of nursing administrators to improve ethical leadership behaviors. The further study should be the relationship model of ethical leadership of nursing administrators and the nursing organizational performance.

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Ethical Clearance: Ethical Clearance was taken from the ethical committee of a private university in Thailand (IRB approval No 28/2560 Feb 18, 2017). We protected personal information and ethical concerns which includes informed consent and maintaining confidentiality. The participants were asked to give their permission to be part of a study. They were also assured of their right to confidentiality and anonymity.[13]

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