

# Explaining ethical challenges and practical solutions from a nursing managements' perspective: A phenomenological study

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction and Objective:** Ethical practice is a vital aspect of nursing interventions. Complying with the ethical aspects of the intervention procedure in a stressful nursing environment is not easy and nurse managers always face ethical challenges which are in conflict with their personal values and norms. Identifying and solving these challenges improves the efficiency and effectiveness of nursing care activities. Therefore, this research was done to explain the ethical challenges of nurse managers and practical solutions from their perspective. **Material and Method:** It is a qualitative study that was carried out based on the phenomenological method in 2022. The participants of this study were 20 nurse managers of Arak hospitals who were selected by purposive sampling until data saturation. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews for 30 to 90 minutes. Data collection was carried out with the participant's consent, using a digital recording device and verbatim transcription, and then it was analyzed using Van Manen's six-step hermeneutic phenomenological approach. **Findings:** The results of this study could provide a clear picture of ethical challenges and their practical solutions from the nurse managers' perspective in the form of four themes of managerial ethical challenges which include challenges facing physicians, organizations, employees, managers, and three themes for practical solutions, including organizational solutions, interpersonal solutions, and educational solutions which were manifested. **Conclusion:** Nurse managers are always faced with ethical challenges in their daily activities. To deal with these challenges, they must be familiar with the rules and principles of professional ethics, practical standards, and laws related to patients' rights. Ethical principles and awareness of the ethical decision-making process are useful and effective in having capable and ethical nurses who provide competent care. To deal with ethical challenges, it is suggested to consider self-care strategies and structural and specialized support in each center, which will ultimately lead to the improvement of service quality and the promotion of ethics in care-treatment environments.

**Keywords:** Ethical challenges, ethics, managerial ethics, nurse managers, solution

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## Introduction

Ethical practice is a vital aspect of nursing care and moral development is necessary for the present and future of nursing practice. because ethical behavior combined with nurses' responsibility to patients plays an effective role in improving

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and restoring their health.<sup>[1]</sup> At first glance, nursing practice is considered to be a clinical activity that is separate from ethics, but actually, there is a connection between ethics and clinical practice.<sup>[2]</sup> A group of researchers believes that the professional nursing practice is so intertwined with ethics that it can be said that nursing is a moral philosophy.<sup>[3]</sup> Breen believe that the nature of nursing is such that they should pay more attention to ethics of care than the treatment considerations<sup>[4]</sup>

Nurses cannot deny the responsibility of responding to patients, therefore they must be able to provide healthy, decent, legal, and ethical care to all patients in all care environments.<sup>[5]</sup> Managers and leaders of ethical issues in nursing, have professional insight through empathic communication, ethical behavior, and superior attitudes, which lead to comprehensive satisfaction and productivity improvement.<sup>[6]</sup> Surely, the most important and sensitive issue in nurse management is to create a balance between professional and ethical performance.<sup>[7]</sup> Medical staff, especially nurses, should protect the patients' rights and prevent both material and non-material damages, which are their moral duty. In the study of Negarandeh *et al.*,<sup>[8]</sup> patient support programs included the actions such as informing, learning, honoring and respecting, supporting, protecting, and providing continuity of care. Ethical failure leads to challenges and consequences that will reduce patient satisfaction.<sup>[9]</sup>

Based on the available studies, 11% of nurses face challenges and moral problems every day, and 36% of them every few days.<sup>[10]</sup> Nurses are plagued by problems and failures in their management field, which are caused by their inappropriate moods and attitudes. However, by relying on ethical principles, managers are able to decide what is right and what is wrong. As ethical issues represent the contrast between economic performance and social performance, they are actually the most crucial problems related to management.<sup>[11]</sup>

The conflict between values turns a situation or problem into an ethical challenge. Besides, when there is no clear choice between conflicting principles, ethical challenges occur. Nurse managers must be able to distinguish ethical challenges.<sup>[12]</sup> Anyway, nurse managers often face ethical challenges due to their wide scope of work, and despite having sufficient expertise, they are unable to face that ethical challenge. Although nursing managers have sufficient expertise, and often face ethical challenges due to their wide scope of work, they are unable to face those ethical challenges. According to Borhani *et al.*,<sup>[13]</sup> nurse managers pay attention to ethical challenges by balancing the principles of harm and benefit. Ethical challenges cause problems such as irresponsibility, poor quality of care, mistrust, feeling helpless, and anger, and in the long term cause nurse burnout.<sup>[14]</sup>

Frequent ethical conflicts and moral distress episodes among nurses working in primary care have been reported.<sup>[15]</sup> Ethical challenges in the work environment caused by a shortage of resources, different professional attitudes, and a stressful work environment endanger the ability of physicians and nurses to

provide high-quality and safe care to their patients.<sup>[16]</sup> General practitioners (GPs) and nurses experienced numerous ethical and moral dilemmas that could undermine professional care. Therefore, managers can implement policies to minimize the number of ethical issues in the workplace to solve ethical challenges. Applying practical methods to solve ethical challenges provides psycho-emotional support for physicians and nurses and makes the workplace safer and more enjoyable for everyone.<sup>[17]</sup> Moreover, solving and managing these challenges by managers is very important for the cooperation between doctors and nurses<sup>[16]</sup> and leads to the satisfaction of healthcare workers (increasing safety and improving physical, mental, and social well-being), higher quality of patient care and reducing the costs of the health and care system (related to the mental recovery of employees and the reduction of their work absences), as well as the reduction of preventable complications and the readmission of patients.<sup>[16]</sup> Although management coping strategies have been adopted to prevent or manage moral distress. However, Further research is needed to examine the moral distress triggers and sources of ethical dilemmas in different settings such as primary care.<sup>[17]</sup>

Nurse managers need logical and ethical decisions to face ethical challenges. An ethical decision starts from the recognition of an ethical problem and ends with a real decision through moral reasoning, which should be established based on Kohlberg's theory (1976) and the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses.<sup>[18]</sup> Nowadays, nurses complain about the impossibility of performing daily activities based on moral values or moral aspects of a team, so they are afraid that it will eventually cause moral tension.<sup>[19]</sup>

It is very difficult to comply with the ethical aspects of healthcare in the complex and stressful work environment of nursing. Moreover, in recent decades nurse managers have repeatedly faced ethical challenges because of the conflicts with their personal values and norms. The efficiency and effectiveness of the hospital will be improved through identifying and solving these challenges. Consequently, the present study is aimed to identify and explain the ethical challenges of nurse managers and provide practical solutions from their perspective.

## Material and Methods

To explain the ethical challenges and practical solutions from the nurse managers perspective, qualitative research with a phenomenological approach was used. Considering that the research environment in qualitative research is a real and natural environment, a purposeful sampling technique was used. In this study, the participants included all nurse managers (matrons, clinical and educational supervisors, head nurses) working in academic medical centers in Arak. Nurse managers in Iran have a bachelor's degree or higher that includes nurses who work at different levels of nurse management and are responsible for directly supervising the provision of diagnostics, clinical and care services, and nursing research and education.<sup>[20]</sup>

In qualitative studies, the data are collected using two methods interview, observation, or a combination of them. In this study, individuals were interviewed semi-structured interview methods with open questions and in placeholder1 situations, in-depth interviewing was used in a face-to-face method. The duration of the interviews varied from 35 to 95 minutes, and until data saturation, the process of conducting the interviews and finding the participants continued. Finally, 20 people participated in the individual interviews [Table 1].

The interview started with the following questions:

- Explain about the ethical challenges you have experienced.
- What strategies have you used to manage these challenges?
- Were the solutions you used to solve the challenge successfully? Please explain.
- What are your experiences in these cases?

Besides, the interview continued with encouraging and deepening quotes according to the participant’s words. Interviews were conducted with the consent of the participant using a digital recording device and verbatim transcription.

Data analysis was done based on Van Manen’s six-step hermeneutic phenomenological approach (2001) using MAXQDA software. To analyze the data based on Van Manen’s approach, first uncovering the thematic aspects was done.<sup>[21]</sup>

For this purpose, after conducting each interview, the audio file was carefully transcribed, and then the text was read several times and checked with the audio file in terms of markings and confirmation of content matching. Then, the transcript file was read several times to discover the thematic aspects. A theme and an interpretive summary were written for each unit of analysis.

For each theme resulting from the units, different hidden aspects were identified. Then Isolating Thematic Statements were made. For this purpose, in Van Manen’s approach (2001) three holistic, selective, and partial approaches were mentioned. In this study, a combination of the mentioned approaches was used which means that different hidden aspects in each theme were recognized with a holistic approach. After that, one time with a selective approach those parts of the text referring to thematic aspects were selected and identified. Then, to improve the validity of the research findings, the text of the interviews was checked with a detailed or line-by-line checking approach and its thematic aspects were identified. In the next stage, Composing Linguistic Transformation, and finally, the last stage of Cleaning Thematic Descriptions from Artistic Sources was done. This means that the sentences and expressions were transformed into phenomenological language and the descriptions and interpretations of the stereotypical and artistic sentences expressed by the participants were done. All the mentioned steps were continued until the main themes were distinguished from the sub-themes.

### Trustworthiness

The following items were the researcher’s strategies to provide trustworthiness in this study:

- The long-term presence of researchers in medical centers and constant dealing with research data and nurse managers, Analyzing the data in the research team and conducting multiple data analysis sessions
- Participating in congresses and holding workshops in association with previous research records and nursing ethics.
- Determining the rules of decision-making in analysis and data collection, noting all the important points and issues when conducting research reviewing them constantly along

**Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of the participants**

Participant	Age (years)	Gender	Education level	Specialty	Working experience (year)
P <sub>1</sub>	43	Female	MSc	Operating room supervisor	11
P <sub>2</sub>	45	Female	BSc	Bedside Supervisor	8
P <sub>3</sub>	51	Male	PhD	Nursing Director	16
P <sub>4</sub>	50	Male	MSc	Nursing Director	15
P <sub>5</sub>	40	Male	MSc	Infection Control Supervisor	9
P <sub>6</sub>	35	Female	MSc	Quality Improvement Supervisor	6
P <sub>7</sub>	49	Male	PhD	Bedside Supervisor	11
P <sub>8</sub>	45	Female	MSc	Educational Supervisor	20
P <sub>9</sub>	39	Female	PhD	Head Nurse	5
P <sub>10</sub>	32	Male	MSc	Supervisor	9
P <sub>11</sub>	37	Male	MSc	Bedside Supervisor	9
P <sub>12</sub>	39	Male	MSc	Nursing Director	14
P <sub>13</sub>	32	Female	PhD	Bedside Supervisor	13
P <sub>14</sub>	43	Female	PhD	Supervisor	12
P <sub>15</sub>	40	Male	MSc	Operating room supervisor	16
P <sub>16</sub>	34	Female	MSc	Quality Improvement Supervisor	10
P <sub>17</sub>	48	Male	PhD	Supervisor	19
P <sub>18</sub>	45	Female	PhD	Head Nurse	11
P <sub>19</sub>	50	Female	MSc	Educational Supervisor	27
P <sub>20</sub>	39	Male	PhD	Nursing Director	17

with the research group and peer and member check, and describing the demographic data of the participants.

Explaining the context, the conditions, and the method of conducting the research for the readers accurately.

Before starting the trial, the study plan was approved by the Ethics Committee of Arak University of Medical Sciences with the code of IR.Arakmu.REC.1398.068.

### Ethical approval

All participants participated in the study voluntarily and written consent was obtained from them before the interview. All the interviews were held outside working hours in a place coordinated previously with the nurse and in a private environment desired by the participants. The voice of participants was recorded while they were aware and satisfied with it and the audio file was stored confidentially and anonymously and protected by setting a password. In the analysis and publication of the data, the names of individuals or even hospitals were not mentioned, and all ethical principles were respected in the writing and publication of research findings.

### Findings

Our study consisted of 20 eligible participants including 10 men and 10 women in the age group of 30-55 who were working in different categories of nurse management [Table 1]. The results of the analysis of data of the perspectives of nurse managers about ethical challenges and their practical solutions were mentioned in the form of four contents of management ethical challenges and three contents of practical solutions: Challenges related to the physicians (lack of regular work planning, lack of sufficient and continuous monitoring of students' performance, the unknownness of the physician), challenges related to the organization (the failure to obey some laws and guidelines, lack of human resources - financial and equipment), Challenges related to employees (lack of general awareness, work routine of personnel, lack of motivation and interest in work), and challenges related to managers (lack of meritocracy in the appointment, lack of spirit of criticality and flexibility, Not paying attention to the professional ethics of employees) [Table 2].

Organizational solutions (implementation of instructions and rules, availability of human and financial resources), interpersonal solutions (mutual accompaniment and understanding, motivation, and encouragement of employees, speech clarity), educational solutions (increasing employees' awareness, improving communication skills) [Table 3].

### Ethical challenges of management

#### Challenges related to the physician

The first issue of this research was "challenges related to physicians". These problems and challenges are related to the physicians that managers face and are the biggest challenges for nurse managers. This issue consists of 3 sub-issues including "lack

**Table 2: Challenges of ethical challenges from Nurse managers viewpoint; issues and Sub-issues**

Issues	Sub-issues
Challenges related to the physician	- Lack of regular work planning, - Lack of sufficient and continuous monitoring of student's performance, - The unknownness of the physician
Challenges related to the organization	- Failure to obey some rules and guidelines - Lack of human resources - financial and equipment
Challenges related to employees	- Lack of general awareness - Work routine of personnel - Lack of motivation and interest in work
Challenges related to managers	- Lack of meritocracy in the appointment - Lack of spirit of criticality and flexibility - Not paying attention to the professional ethics of employees

**Table 3: Practical solutions of ethical challenges from nurse managers perspective; issues and sub-issues**

Issues	Sub-issues
Organizational solutions	- Implementation of instructions and rules - Availability of human and financial resources
Interpersonal solutions	- Mutual accompaniment and understanding - Motivation and encouragement of employees - Speech clarity
Educational solutions	- Increasing employees' awareness - Improving communication skills

of regular work planning", "lack of sufficient and continuous monitoring of students' performance", and "the unknownness of the physician". The following shows the experiences of some participants in relation to this issue.

#### Lack of regular work planning

One of the most common issues expressed by the participants was the physicians' unpunctuality. One of the participants in this field stated that "doctors didn't know their schedule, it is the patient's right to be visited daily" (P11). "Surgeons arrive late and leave early on the day of surgery" (P3) "The patient waits in the inpatient department for long hours to be visited by the doctor" (P6). "Irregular attendance of the doctors at the hospital caused people to protest" (P7). "In one shift work, despite reporting the critical condition of a patient to the doctor seven times, he refused to attend the patient's bedside" (p10, p11).

#### Lack of sufficient and continuous monitoring of students' performance

In this regard, the participants mentioned the following: "In most academic medical centers, the majority of students are confused and work without the presence of their professor" (P3). "Unfortunately, there is little supervision and control over medical students" (p13).

#### Unknownness of the physician

"The patients always complain and say that we never saw our doctor and we don't know whom" (p8). "The doctors are not



used to introducing themselves to the patient and they take the patient's history as an unknown person" (p4).

### Challenges related to the organization

The second abstraction issue of this research was the challenges related to the organization. This issue includes the sub-issues of "failure to obey some rules and guidelines", and "lack of human resources - financial and equipment".

#### *Failure to obey some rules and guidelines*

One of the participants stated that "doctors and nurses are not eager to fully implement the rules of the hospital, and are not held accountable in this regard" (p16). "Despite the fact that educating patients is one of the legal duties of doctors they do not do this at all" (P18). "According to the patient's rights charter, educating patients should be done by the doctor" (P14). "Despite the fact that documents related to safe surgery should be completed by operating room nurses, they don't do that" (P17).

#### *Lack of human resources - financial and equipment*

As many participants believed, an existing problem is "the lack of nursing staff, so that when two of them are absent for some reason, the shift work schedule will face a serious problem" (P6). Another participant stated: "Lack of credit to buy necessary equipment and supplies in the hospital is a serious crisis" (P10). "When we give a one-month program to the staff while we have a shortage of manpower, the psychological stress of this program affects everyone" (p9).

### \*Challenges related to employees

This issue includes 3 sub-issues including "lack of general knowledge", "work routine of employees", and "lack of motivation and interest in work".

#### *Lack of general knowledge*

The following are examples of the statements of nurse managers: "Study and participation in scientific conferences of nurses and doctors has decreased a lot, they prefer to work with their old information" (P9). "Nurses are not familiar with specialized and new techniques in their field of work" (P10).

#### *Work routine of staff*

"The staff resists any changes in their work process" (P1). "Nurses often write a nursing report without taking a history from the patient, and they are used to imitate each other" (P5).

#### *Lack of motivation and interest in work*

In this regard, a participant stated that; "Nurses entered this field just to make a living" (P20). "Most nurses are not interested in this job and have chosen this job because of its high income" (P11). "Due to the difficulty of this job, nurses' motivation and desire is very low" (p12).

### \*Challenges related to managers

This issue consisted of the following sub-themes; "lack of meritocracy in appointment", "low attention to the professional

ethics of employees", and "lack of spirit of criticality and flexibility".

#### *Lack of meritocracy in appointment*

It is one of the issues that the participants emphasized. They stated that it is necessary to consider the personnel's opinions in providing nursing care and solving existing problems. For instance: "The professional and moral characteristics of the person are not taken into account in the selection of employees and managers" (P9). "Many nurse managers are appointed, while they do not have any of the required characteristics to be a manager" (p15).

#### *Lack of spirit of criticality and flexibility*

In addition to their stable supervision of clinical affairs and monitoring the activity of staff, successful managers are open to criticism. One of the participants stated; "The most important characteristic of a manager is to behave gently and also have the ability to accept any criticism from the others" (P13, p19). "Most nursing supervisors cannot bear criticism and get angry quickly (p1, p11, p8).

#### *Lack of attention to the professional ethical standard of employees*

The participants believe that "when the manager is a model for ethical decision-making, doesn't hold grudges, and makes decisions based on logic, it will promote professional ethics" (P14, P16, p17). "The monitoring of professionalism is very high, but the monitoring of ethical issues in nursing is very low" (p1, p14). "In professions that deal with humans, professional ethics issues are more significant" (p8).

### Practical solutions

#### *\* Organizational solutions*

The first abstraction issue was "organizational solutions" which is one of the basic and fundamental concepts of nurse managers. Patient-centered care is a necessary factor in gaining public trust which causes a decrease in the average patient's stay in the hospital, an increment in patient satisfaction, a reduction of hospital costs, and overall improvement in health situation and the patient's quality of life. This issue has the following sub-issues "implementation of rules and guidelines" and "availability of human and financial resources".

#### *Implementation of rules and guidelines*

The participants' statements indicate the sensitivity of the issue: "Availability of a pharmacy in the operating room prevents the illegal actions of the staff" (P12, p2), "Correct implementation of accreditation in hospitals, makes all the staff responsible for their duties" (P9, p13, p20), "Doctors should be fined for any delay, for example, canceling the surgeries for the doctors who are irregular and untimely" (P14, p11), "Supervision and monitoring of the staff's performance should be increased" (p6, p7, p12).

### Availability of human and financial resources

Most managers commented in this regard that: “There is a need to increase the number of nursing staff because the number of patients does not match the nursing staff” (p7, p13, p12). “Having specialized and necessary equipment requires having a good financial credit” (p4, p8, p2).

### \* Interpersonal solutions

#### Mutual accompaniment and understanding

Some managers said “I don’t like to talk to the staff publicly and humiliate them in the group” (p11, p5, p19). “Psychological support and empathy with the staff encourage them to work, even if they receive their salaries late” (p3, p7, p10). “Personal consultation and maintaining the confidentiality of the staff’s information increases their trust in the manager” (p16, p4).

#### Motivating and encouraging employees

“I encourage the staff publicly to increase their work motivation” (p6, p9, p1). “Encouraging improves the communication of nurse with the patient and also increase their clinical performance” (p5, p14, p3).

#### Speech clarity

“If there is ambiguity in the behavior and speech which may lead to emotional harms, it should be clarified” (p1, p8). “When the staff have a right comprehension of their work process and receive real feedback from the manager, the quality of healthcare services will improve” (p5, p18, p12).

### \* Educational solutions

#### Improving the level of awareness

Many nursing managers believe that: “Holding professional ethics training programs awakens the conscience of the staff and prevents nurses from secret work” (p2, p9, p20). “Vocational and specialized training should be continuous so that it has more clear effect” (p13, p15, p4).

#### Improving communication skills

“Having a strong communication with patients is one of the most important ways to increase patient satisfaction (p10, p7).” Education on how to deal with the staff, how to keep the patient’s information confidential can help in the early recovery of the patient and his faster discharge” (p9, p5).

## Discussion

This study explains ethical challenges and gives practical solutions from the nurse managers perspective. Based on the results of this research, nurse managers have different challenges in terms of organization, employees, physicians, and managers. The most crucial and common challenges are mentioned below.

### Challenges related to the physician

The role of professional ethics in all stages of providing health care services has been agreed upon by researchers and has a

significant impact on the organization’s activities and outcomes. Professional ethics means a set of rules which are followed by people voluntarily and based on the call of their conscience and natural tendency in doing professional work.<sup>[22]</sup> One of the most important challenges of medical ethics is the lack of proper communication with the patient, the lack of sufficient and continuous monitoring of students’ performance, and finally, the lack of discipline at work. In their study Mahmoodian *et al.*<sup>[23]</sup> showed that having the ability to act on time, proper follow-up of the patient, respecting the patient’s rights in all conditions, duty orientation, and responsibility are among the most significant traits of a physician. According to Mahmoodi Shan *et al.*,<sup>[24]</sup> the sense of responsibility, work ethic, appropriate relationships with patients, and attention to recognizing the patient’s identity is among the most important ethical issues of the treatment staff.

It seems that factors such as treating patients gently, respect for patients, considering moral principles regarding the treatment, Intimacy in the patient-physician relationship, and having regular planning make the patient provide sufficient information to the physician and increase the patient’s trust to a physician. The above findings could be justified by referring to the results of manias and Bolster, which showed that the limitation of time caused by nursing workload leads to a change in the process of treatment and medical care procedure.<sup>[25]</sup> However, the high interference of patient’s companions, their anxiety, and worries causes inappropriate interaction between physicians and their patients. Moreover, this inappropriate communication leads to an incomplete exchange of information, misunderstanding, and the increment of the patient’s anxiety.<sup>[26]</sup>

Another functional challenge mentioned by the participants was the weakness in the control and supervision of the students while being trained. This challenge led to a very superficial supervision of medical services in the department which was one of the basic problems of supervision. It seems that one of the main factors that leads to insufficient supervision of the performance of clinical students and ultimately creates educational defects is time limitation due to treatment workload. In a similar study by Kihlgren *et al.*<sup>[27]</sup> it was reported that factors such as overcrowding in the treatment department, fatigue, and multi-responsibility of the staff can decrease the quality of medical services and ultimately cause dissatisfaction. One of the most important solutions presented by nurse managers to solve this challenge is the implementation of instructions and rules to create discipline, control, supervision, and respect for the patient.

However, from a medical ethics perspective, justice in service delivery is one of the most important dimensions of work ethics, which is emphasized in the present study and is known as a trustworthiness factor in other studies.<sup>[28]</sup> Emanuel *et al.*<sup>[29]</sup> expressed ethical codes around equality and social justice. Based on the findings of this research, access to justice increases the organizational commitment of physicians and makes them more sensitive and abide in implementing order, supervision, and respect for the patient.

## Organizational challenges and solutions

Lack of material, human, and equipment resources and non-observance of clinical guidelines were among the most important challenges related to the organization from nurse managers perspective. To justify these findings, it can be said that, like all people, nurses have their own families and loved ones, so they find themselves in a competition between their commitments to family, work, and their lovers. The lack of facilities, staff, and especially personal protection equipment causes more confusion which causes moral injury.

Nurses' commitment to the care of patients, as well as their right and responsibility to protect themselves and care for their families, creates a conflict between professional obligations and personal responsibilities. A study by Heydari *et al.*<sup>[30]</sup> showed that the lack of equipment and facilities leads nurses to not perform moral obligations, even if the reason for this is justifiable, such unhealthy feelings of nurses can lead them to job burnout. Consequently, the lack of human, financial, and material resources causes nurses to behave with an indifferent attitude toward patients, which decreases the quality of patient care. The study by Mahmoudi *et al.*<sup>[31]</sup> was also in line with the results achieved from this study.

They revealed that the inappropriateness of the physical structure of the emergency department is one of the examples of not paying attention to nurses and patients. The general atmosphere in the hospitals was not in accordance with their expectations and performance.<sup>[31]</sup> Moreover, the neglect of the basic requirements has been directed not only at the patient but also at the nurses. In their study, Hagbaghery *et al.* between 2002 and 2004 it was revealed that the lack of human resources is one of the structural factors that put stress on nurses through which causing them to feel dissatisfied and powerless.<sup>[32]</sup> It seems that the lack of nurses is a global problem that all care environments are facing. However, the inappropriateness of processes and the absence of guidelines and rules, especially in the field of staff distribution in different departments, is one other of the biggest organizational challenges.

In their study, Bayrami *et al.*<sup>[33]</sup> introduced the shortage of human resources as one of the most crucial challenges in clinical departments. In this regard, they mentioned the determining guidelines and processes for nursing care as one of the solutions to reduce this challenge. In this study too, one of the solutions that nurse managers mentioned to solve the above challenges is organizational solutions. It seems that nurse managers should develop supporting strategies to recognize and provide clinical processes and guidelines that reflect targeted care, responsibility sense, and promotion of appropriate communication, respect, and support to the patient. According to Valizadeh *et al.* study,<sup>[34]</sup> which is in line with the data of our study, law-abiding and conscientiousness, which have a very close meaning, should be included in instructions and implementation of clinical processes. Law-abiding is one of the ethical behaviors of employees with

supervisors and managers. Moreover, conscientiousness is one of the ethical aspects that employees should have with their colleagues. It should be noted that training and changing cultural beliefs are required to develop these ethical characteristics.

## Challenges related to employees and interpersonal solutions

Among the other issues obtained in the current study, the challenges related to employees include work routine, lack of motivation and interest in work, and lack of new information and general knowledge. One of the major problems experienced by most managers was the lack of motivation and interest in the work among nurses, which may be due to the differences in the level of income of employees in the organization. As reported in Heydari's study, financial motivation is a very important factor for nurses that can motivate them.<sup>[30]</sup> The study of Kunaviktikul *et al.*<sup>[35]</sup> was also in line with our achievements. This challenge can adversely affect the quality of patient care.

In a study conducted by Kihlgren *et al.*(2005)<sup>[27]</sup> in Sweden, the results revealed that nurses should have a deep comprehension of the patient's position in society. In this regard, they should be experienced enough to provide safe care. To justify the above findings, it can be said that during the provision of patient care, nurses should pay attention to the moral aspects of the patient. The lack of care services according to the moral requirements of patients is one of the ethical challenges.<sup>[36]</sup> In their study Rezapour Nasrabad *et al.*<sup>[37]</sup> showed that the lack of attention to moral requirements of patients is constantly experienced by nurses so that there is no interaction between caregivers and care recipients. Moreover, nurses do not consider real care with respect for the patient's dignity as well as ignoring to pay attention to the psychological requirements of the patient. One of the solutions that nurse managers mentioned that could solve this problem was mutual understanding. Unmotivated nurses should be sure that the nurse manager supports and respects them because of their help and support, especially in times of crisis. So, these nurses feel respected and proud and get rid of their daily routine work and lack of motivation. Strengthening the professional identity of nurses will improve their compliance with ethical principles and professional norms. Besides, nurse managers should establish clear, attentive, and honest communication with nurses to avoid confusion in their communication. The studies of Jia-Yuxin *et al.*<sup>[38]</sup> and Rothan<sup>[39]</sup> were also consistent with the above results. Based on the results of the present study, encouragement of employees by managers and voluntarily transferring the experiences of managers to employees can create an interactive atmosphere in the work environment with colleagues and become a factor in updating the knowledge and information of nurses.

## Challenges related to managers and educational solutions

One of the most significant challenges related to managers is not having the spirit of criticism and flexibility. In their study, Valizadeh *et al.*<sup>[34]</sup> reported an improvement in the critical spirit



of nurse managers by creating evidence-based work teams and performing efficient dynamic activities. Therefore, improving the level of awareness of employees by training can create two approaches, however, it provides the skills and knowledge needed by employees, and however, with the aim of developing managers' ethics, improves working relationships. The study of Valente *et al.* is in line with the data achieved in our study.<sup>[40]</sup>

Deprivation of nurses from training to increase their knowledge of communication skills, education, and suitable tools to reduce moral injuries, causes bad consequences. Being aware of ethical behaviors helps them to improve their critical spirit, and flexibility, and seek justice in clinical systems. The studies of Zaghini *et al.*<sup>[41]</sup> were also in line with the above results. Ethical training is required to educate managers and nurses so that in moral dilemma situations have appropriate knowledge and respond appropriately. Many ethical challenges arise as a result of conflicts between nurses and other colleagues, organizations, patients, and families. The main cause of most complaints and dissatisfaction is the lack of proper communication. According to the data represented by Zhu J *et al.*<sup>[42]</sup> which was in line with our findings, it seems that improving communication skills through training is very effective.

Meritocracy is one of the required behaviors in management. Meritocracy in appointments can only be achieved by enhancing access to justice. Observing meritocracy has a significant impact on the managers' attitude toward the organization and strengthens organizational trust. Siddiqi's study was also in line with the findings of this study which showed that meritocracy means having justice in behaviors, promotion of employees, and their appointment.<sup>[43]</sup> Frederickson (1990) expressed the ethical codes around equality and social justice. Based on the findings of this research, justice causes employees to obey the instructions of the manager raises their dignity with the employees. Consequently, managers are appreciated by their employees, and the relationship formed based on justice will be continuous and strong. In their study, Samadi and Mahdavi Kho revealed that justice is one of the most important characteristics of management ethics, which has the greatest impact on the organizational commitment of employees.<sup>[44]</sup> Lack of attention to the ethical behaviors of employees was another challenge for managers. The acceptance of professional ethics is necessary to avoid conflict in the organization and society. However, it guarantees long-term interests through making rational and wise decisions.<sup>[45]</sup>

In their study, Khayat Moghadam *et al.*<sup>[46]</sup> revealed that paying more attention to professional ethics by employees and managers, the more successful the organization will be in achieving its goals. Consequently, nurse managers should consider certain behavioral norms such as conscientiousness, honesty, justice, cheerfulness, confidentiality, and tolerance. All these considerations are because their behavior in the hospital can be a good model for learning how to behave properly and affect the job satisfaction and personality of the staff.

## Conclusion

This study explained ethical challenges and their practical solutions from nurse managers' perspectives. The data achieved from the analysis and discussion of the findings of this study during the phenomenological process revealed that nurse managers are always faced with ethical challenges in their daily activities. To deal with these challenges and aim to provide ethical behavior, they must be familiar with the principles and rules of professional ethics, practical standards, and patient rights laws. Fundamental principles of ethics and being familiar with the process of ethical decision-making are useful and effective factors in training specialized and ethical nurses who provide decent care. Due to the lack of adequate training in the field of care work, most nurses may face challenges in converting their moral decisions into moral actions. Consequently, their unresolved moral injury may cause job depression and long-term consequences. Therefore, the most effective solution is to conduct ethics training courses for nurses and students. It is suggested that to deal with ethical challenges, self-care strategies, and structural and specialized support should be considered in each healthcare department, which ultimately leads to an improvement in the quality of given services and also the promotion of ethics in care-treatment environments.

## Research limitations

One of the most important limitations of this research was the lack of studies conducted in the field of hospital management challenges. In this regard, similar studies were used. Besides, the present study was conducted through a qualitative method. As qualitative data cannot be widely generalized, it is suggested that the issues related to the ethical challenge of management also be examined quantitatively. However, the contents of this research can help planners in the field of health in creating a tool to measure the components of the ethical issues that managers face.

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## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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