

Ethical Challenges Nurses Face in Spain

Currently, nurses in Spain, and even more so Christian nurses, face ethical challenges. Laws have changed and ethics are being questioned. What was illegal and socially seen as bad a few years ago is today justified as something good and legal, even acquiring the level of human rights.

Many Christian nurses are questioned whether they want to exercise conscientious objection on issues such as abortion and euthanasia; these are the only cases where conscientious objection is still allowed in Spain. In fact, some jurists fear that this right to conscientious objection is at risk and could be lost if the healthcare worker's right conflicts with the right demanded by some patients to euthanasia and abortion. In those cases, patients' rights would be stronger. Nurses' right to conscientious objection as regulated in Spanish law is rather precarious; it is not protected as a fundamental right as are other rights.

We see that with issues important to people's physical, emotional, and psychological health, such as transgenderism and hormone treatment of minors, conscientious objection is not considered a possibility. However, we are concerned about the future of these minors if they want to reverse their gender change. In Spain, lawsuits have been filed against public health services related to this topic. Laws have been enacted without listening

to experts from different fields who have presented risks that may arise for minors in these circumstances. The science which questions the suitability of practices such as early hormone treatment has not received attention, despite available evidence on the subject. A proposal we of NCF Spain are preparing aims to shape what we call *science objection*. We are researching and gathering documentation from Spain and other countries that are already backing away from such treatments. We would like to present this

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documentation to the International Council of Nurses, the European Parliament, and other places where we have access and where legislation is in place.

Another ethical challenge facing nurses in Spain is in vitro fertilization and embryo manipulation. We see that NaProTECHNOLOGY—another means of assisting procreation—does not pose ethical dilemmas. It is respectful of women's health, and the emotional and economic costs are lower. We want to spread the word about this method and possibly teach it as nurses.

Another challenge in a world with a large aging population and a greater need for care is that priority

is given to decriminalizing euthanasia and neglecting palliative care, as well as re-educating society about the worth of life. Some thinkers consider that the Overton window is being used to transform the social culture from seeing an idea as unacceptable, to seeing it, after some time, as desirable and socially accepted (del Val, 2022).

Another point for reflection is how artificial intelligence (AI) will affect healthcare. Both risks and challenges exist with AI. As nurses, we ask how AI will affect care and relationships with patients. How do we respond and continue to add value to care? Will we continue to *be present*? Presence in nursing goes beyond physical care, opening opportunities for emotional and spiritual care. We hold a holistic view of nursing care and need to advocate for quality care that is patient and family centered. Is it possible that AI could replace human empathy and compassion? When I interact with AI, there is no nuance: individuality is lost, which is essential in our daily work with patients. God treats each of us individually, with all of our nuances (Psalm 139:1-18).

As nurses we have great challenges to advocate for patient and family care over ideologies, even as ideologies are influencing the financial and human resources that go into care. May God give us wisdom (Proverbs 2:6) to meet patients' needs and be an influence for life among our peers and in the healthcare system. May we be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16) and bring hope (Jeremiah 29:11), knowing that God is still God (Isaiah 37:16). 

del Val, A. (2022). *La ventana de Overton and deceit*. Seneca Institute. <https://instituto-seneca.edu/la-ventana-de-overton-comunicacion-politica/>

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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DOI:10.1097/CNJ.0000000000001290