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PREDISPOSITION OF LONG TERM CARE NURSES VERSUS
ACUTE CARE NURSES TO WITHDRAWING OR
MAINTAINING LIFE-SUSTAINING TUBE FEEDINGS

AN ABSTRACT OF
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference in the attitudes of the acute care nurse as compared with the long term care nurse regarding the provision of life sustaining tube feedings. The sample was comprised of 10 acute care nurses and 30 long term care nurses who had a minimum of six months practice in their respective work settings. The instrument used was a self-administered questionnaire that included 10 questions which were selected from a previously used instrument called the "Institutional Profile". When the scores of these two groups of nurses were compared for each of the 10 items, they differed only on two items. The acute care nurses strongly agreed with the statement that, "There is no ethical difference between forgoing (not starting) a life support measure and stopping it once it has been started," ($M = 3.07$; $SD = 1.46$) while long term care nurses generally disagreed ($M = 1.7$; $SD = 0.82$). However, acute care nurses generally disagreed with the statement, "Disconnecting a tube feeding is killing a patient," ($M = 1.67$; $SD 0.80$) while long term care nurses agree ($M = 3.3$; $SD = 1.42$, $t'(10.98) = -3.46$, $p = .005$). The conclusion of this study that there is overall agreement in the attitudes of nurses working in both long term care and acute care institutions but that there also exists some differences in ethical viewpoints regarding the provision of life-sustaining tube feedings. The implications of these findings for nursing is that nurses could benefit from discussing these issues in a cross-institutional forum. Nurse educators should address these type of ethical questions in class discussion with nursing students and remain current regarding the provision of life-sustaining tube feedings.