

Experiences of Health Care Providers in Using Therapeutic White Lies in Patient Ethical Care Process

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Abstract

Background: Unfolding the whole truth in treatment is an ethical principle and an essential part of patients' rights. Sometimes, under certain circumstances, members of the treatment team find themselves in a plight where they are forced to lie or tell white lies. The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences of treatment team about telling white lies in specific patient care conditions.

Methods: The present study is a qualitative one (content analysis). The study sample consisted of 14 members of the treatment team working in hospitals affiliated to Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. The data were collected through in-depth and semi-structured interviews in two focus groups and based on the actual experiences of treatment team regarding white lies in the patient care process. The process of data analysis was performed according to the proposed steps of Graneheim and Lundman. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, Lincoln and Guba paradigm was applied.

Results: The analysis of data yielded 420 primary codes, 10 categories, and 3 main themes. The resulting themes included specific circumstances justifying the need to tell white lies, reasons for white lying, and the strategies to circumvent such lies.

Conclusion: Unfolding the truth must be considered an ethical principle. However, the point at issue and the main challenge is providing the conditions to prepare the patient for hearing the facts and the optimal ways of telling such facts. Moreover, treatment team should be informed how to deal with the probable reactions of the patients after telling them the truth.

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