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## INTRODUCTION

Today's world, we are in the throes of a giant ethical leap that is essentially embracing all of humankind, scientific and technological advances, economic realities, pluralistic worldviews, and global communication make it impossible for nurses to ignore the important ethical issues in the world community, their individual lives, and their work. As controversial and sensitive ethical issues continue to challenge nurses and other health care professionals, many professional have begun to develop an appreciation for personal philosophies of ethics and the diverse viewpoints of others (*Carter, 2010*).

Ethics is a branch of philosophy; it means different things to different people. Ethics is the study of ideal human behavior and ideal ways of being. The approaches to ethics and the meanings of ethically related concepts have varied over time among philosophers and ethicists (*Butts & Rich, 2008*).

Ethics is not the law. Ethics is more than just learning theories written by dead people. Ethics is about learning how to learn, about developing the skills to think critically and argue logically to support your perspective. You may come out believing the same things, but you will have good reasons for holding that position. Ethics is about knowing and developing the self to become not only a better person but also to become an engaged citizen of the world. Ethics is about good practice and building a strong character through habit. Ethics helps you to open your mind, to look at the world with a new skeptical eye, and to engage in reasoned debate rather than being swayed by emotional rhetoric (*Shoulah, 2009*).

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A code of ethics does not have the power of law. However, they do function as a guide to the highest standard of ethical practice and outlines the nurse's responsibilities to the patient, the employer, the profession, employing institutions, and society. Several nurses associations all over the world developed a code that is doing nursing ethics as: The American Nurses Association (ANA), the International Council of Nurses (ICN), the Canadian Nurses Association (CAN), and the United Kingdom Central Council (UKCC) (*Sharp, 2009*).

Code of ethics for registered nurses is a statement of the ethical values of nurses and of nurses' commitments to persons with health-care needs and persons receiving care. It is intended for nurses in all contexts and domains of nursing practice and at all levels of decision-making. It is developed by nurses for nurses and can assist nurses in practicing ethically and working through ethical challenges that arise in their practice with individuals, families, communities and public health systems (*ANA, 2009*).

Ethical principles are guidelines that can apply to situations to decide whether they are morals or immoral in nursing practice. It is not always practical to refer to the entire ethical theories for decision-making. Nurses often look toward, moral specific ethical principles to guide their judgment and decisions. There is disagreement among authors regarding the number of key moral principles. However, there is an agreement that they do not have hierarchical order (*Janies, et al, 2008*).

Ethical decisions in maternal health frequently involve maternal-fetal conflict, in which the status of the fetus as a person is still debated. In maternal care, the ethical assumption is made that the pregnant

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woman's decision regarding medical intervention will be beneficial to both the expectant mother and her fetus (*Saber & El-sayed 2007*).

According to the *American Nurses Association (ANA)* code of ethics, nurses have an ethical duty to respect the dignity and human rights of other persons and to treat them with compassion regardless of health condition, ethnicity, or life style (*ANA, 2006*).

In Egypt, although there is no specific ethical code regulating nursing practice, yet there are several resources, which provide the base for professional conduct, which are congruent with the universal standards. These resources are professional ethics policy (Egyptian Nursing Syndicate, 1976). The Egyptian Nursing Oath, The international Council of Nurses (ICN) Code of Ethics for Nurses, Code of ethics for the Egyptian physician, 1974, Islamic code of Medical Ethics (International Organization of Islamic Medicine 1981) (*RNAO, 2007*).

### **Significance of the study**

No guidelines scheme about ethics is utilized by nurses in obstetrics and gynecology department at Benha University Hospital. Therefore, this study is designed to enhance nurse's performance by providing them with ethics guidelines to build up the accreditation process and to improve the health care quality.