

## **Moral Competence of Nursing Students in Lyceum of the Philippines University: Implications to Nursing Practice**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study aimed to determine the nursing students' moral competence in terms of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights, and analyzed its implications to nursing practice, and to propose a program towards the enhancement of moral competence of graduates.*

*The study utilized the descriptive research design using 73 nursing students from levels I to IV as respondents. The participants were selected using convenience sampling, the data were gathered through a questionnaire-checklist constructed by the author and content validated by experts of the field. Weighted mean was used for data analysis.*

*The findings show that student-nurses practicing in Batangas are morally competent in terms of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights. They understand the extent of their future roles and functions and will work in accordance to the standards of nursing practices. Based on this, it could be expected that these students will promote care for the welfare of their clients. Thus, the programs towards enhancement of nursing students' understanding on patients' conditions and circumstances specifically on the concept of suffering, empathy, acceptance and nursing students' ability to provide a peaceful environment are essential for patients' recovery. Developing a program on supportive patient modalities will enhance patient equanimity in health care delivery system.*

**Keywords:** moral competence, Implications, nursing practice

### **INTRODUCTION**

The nursing profession requires increasing competence of its practitioners at all levels because competent nursing practice for the pursuit of health care is expected throughout society. Nursing practice-based competence must be emphasized and assessed among nurses. Sellman (2011) has the notion of competence as the unit of integrated knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for successful performance of professional tasks. However, according to Lind (2012) the concept of competence has a long tradition and comprises more than the concept of subject knowledge. Apart from the latter, it also includes the ability to accept responsibility for one's own

behavior, to apply knowledge, and to understand processes. Therefore, competence goes beyond simple knowing, it requires doing. Competence in actual practice is not the same as simply fulfilling educational requirements or maintaining a nursing license. Competence requires an up to date knowledge base and is manifested by demonstrating the ability to achieve desired outcomes through the performance of defined skills.

In nursing, competence is defined as the possession of basic nursing skills, including: (1) clinical competence which entails assessment and intervention skills, clinical judgment, and technical skills; (2) general competence which involves/communication, critical thinking, and problem solving skills; and (3) moral competence which pertains to the individual's ability to live in a manner consistent with a personal moral code and role responsibilities. (Jornsri et al., 2005). The article of Jomsri (2008) presents the derivation of moral competence in nursing practice by identifying its attributes founded on Thai culture. In this process moral competence is formed and based on the Thai nursing value system, including personal, social and professional values. Its three dimensions (moral perception, judgment and behavior) are also identified. Additionally, eight attributes as indicators of moral competence are identified and selected from three basic values. The eight attributes are loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty, and respect for human values, dignity and rights. All attributes are discussed by addressing the three moral dimensions in order to present a paradigm on how to deal with ethical issues in nursing practice. As a summary, a model of moral competence is presented to demonstrate moral competence in nursing practice in Thailand.

This is because nursing practice depends not only on technical knowledge and skills but also on values, beliefs and ethics, which play a significant role in decision making. Competence in ethics has also become part of the caring qualities of health care personnel, including nurses and physicians.

In addition, moral competence in nursing practice requires familiarity with and commitment to nursing values. Discovery of basic values and reaching an agreement on clinical ethical values are essential with regard to constant changes in nurses' social class and role. Nurses' awareness of their values and the effect of these values on their behavior is a core part of humanistic nursing care (Shih et al., 2009). They need to tailor their function to the value system and cultural beliefs of their service recipients. Social, cultural, religious, political, and economic considerations influence individuals and their value system, and ultimately, health, education, social strategies, and patients' care. Naturally, nurses' life experiences, including the context of their life and practice, result in a way of knowing, and nursing knowledge is embedded in beliefs, values and traditions, religious and cultural observances, and other contextual layers of life.

Furthermore, Taylor (1995) claimed that modern society requires moral competence of its nurses, charging them to be aware of moral competence in order to work through ethical issues encountered in their practice. Nurses who have skills in moral competence can be trusted to act in ways that advance the interest of patients. They can be accountable for the practice to themselves, the patients, the caregiving team and society. They also act as effective patient advocates and mediate ethical conflict among patients, significant others, health care team members, and other interested parties.

For these reasons, nursing schools and educators play critical role in developing responsible and value-laden nurses.

It is in this context that the researcher would like to explore on the moral competence of student nurses since understanding their values, qualities and competence will help educators decide what aspect of moral formation should be emphasized to promote moral competence among nursing students. The findings can also be used as baseline data for the college of nursing in improving the current competence on the nursing curriculum.

The study aimed to determine the nursing students' moral competence in terms of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights; and analyze its implications to the nursing practice; and to propose program towards the enhancement of moral competence of nursing students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used the descriptive method of research. The respondents of the study were 73 nursing students from levels I to IV. They comprised the 30 percent of the total population (242) of nursing students enrolled in the College of Nursing, Lyceum of the Philippines University for the first semester of School Year 2013-2014. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling. They are the students who were available and willing to participate in their study during the time of data gathering.

Data were collected through a questionnaire, some items were adopted from the study of Jormsri et al. (2005) and the remaining items were content validated by three clinical instructors from the College of Nursing. The questionnaire included 5-item statements corresponding to the eight attributes of moral competence: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights.

The weighted mean was the main tool that was used to treat and analyze the data. This tool determined the level of moral competence of nursing students at Lyceum of the Philippines University, Batangas in terms of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights.

The norm for interpretation used the scale shown below:

Weight	Scale	Verbal Interpretation
4	3.50-4.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.50-3.49	Agree
2	1.50-2.49	Disagree
1	1.00-1.49	Strongly Disagree

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On Moral Competence of Nursing Students. The moral competence of nursing students was measured in terms of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights. The level of competence of the students along the above-mentioned dimensions are displayed in the summary tables.

**Table 1**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of**  
**Loving Kindness**

Loving Kindness	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
I have the desire to care for patients.	3.79	Strongly Agree	3
I have good intentions towards my patient and significant others	3.95	Strongly Agree	1
I have the desire to make others happy	3.70	Strongly Agree	4
I understand patient's conditions and circumstances	3.56	Strongly Agree	5
I am concerned with the well being of patients and significant others	3.85	Strongly Agree	2
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

### Loving Kindness

Table 1 shows that the nursing students strongly agree that they possess the characteristics of loving kindness based on the composite mean score of 3.77.

It can be noted that nursing students have good intentions towards their patients and significant others (M=3.95), they are concerned with the well-being of patients and significant others (M=3.85) and they have the desire to care for patients.

On the other hand, least among the items were the desire to make others happy (M=3.70) and understanding patient’s conditions and circumstances (M=3.56).

Nursing care is directed toward meeting the comprehensive needs of patients and their families across the continuum of care. According to Heiskanen (2005) patients were reported wanting support from their nurses to decrease anxiety and worry. Nurses should support patients as individuals to increase their feelings of safety, reduce their anxieties and increase the patient trust and faith in the future.

With this, it is expected that nurses have the innate concern of care for clients and their families. This implies that students in nursing should have the desire to care for others. Tongprateep (2002) posited that loving kindness is the most significant value for nursing care, especially for a good relationship between nurses and patients. It is related to the wellbeing of patients and significant others. That is, when nurses exhibit loving kindness with good intention, patients will benefit most.

**Table 2**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of**  
**Compassion**

Compassion	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I have the desire to free patients from their pain	3.79	Strongly Agree	2
2. I avoid harmful actions towards my patients	3.82	Strongly Agree	1
3. I support patient’s feelings	3.55	Strongly Agree	4
4. I perform nursing roles to alleviate suffering	3.66	Strongly Agree	3
5. I pity the suffering of others	3.33	Agree	5
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.63</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

**Compassion**

Table 2 presents the moral competence of nursing students in terms of compassion. The results revealed that the respondents tend to be highly compassionate as evidenced by the composite mean score of 3.63.

Among the above characteristics, “I avoid harmful action towards my patient” got the highest rank. The results attested that nursing students avoid harmful actions towards patients (M=3.82), they have the desire to free patients from their pain (M=3.79), they perform nursing roles to alleviate suffering (M=3.66) and support patient’s feelings (M=3.55)

Being compassionate is one unique characteristic that is distinct among nurses. Being able to alleviate suffering, letting them feel comfortable and easing their

pain are nurses' acts of compassion. Compassion is described by Roach (1992) as a means to be with another in his suffering. It is empathy and sensitivity to human pain and joy that allows one to enter into the experience of another. It is the understanding of whom that person truly is for whom one is caring.

Avoiding harmful actions means that nurses provide the best and appropriate care to their clients. Care and interventions which are safe and effective will harness faster recovery. Further, the findings suggest that when these nurses perform these roles their primary concern would be how they could be of help to their patients.

On the other hand, it can be noted that "I pity the suffering of others" (M=3.33) has the least mean among the items. This finding implies that student nurses understand the condition and the feelings of their clients which are suggestive of acceptance and empathy.

**Table 3**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of**  
**Sympathetic Joy**

Sympathetic Joy	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I respond gladly by providing help and support to others as they struggle to do good.	3.64	Strongly Agree	4
2. I maintain and encourage good relationships between nursing students and others	3.67	Strongly Agree	3
3. I create happy and peaceful health care environment.	3.62	Strongly Agree	5
4. I express pleasure when patients succeed in obtaining medical care and regain their health.	3.70	Strongly Agree	2
5. I cooperate with nursing team members and other health care providers by providing sincere help and support	3.79	Strongly Agree	1
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.68</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

### **Sympathetic Joy**

The composite mean score value of 3.68 revealed in table 3 suggests that nursing students are morally competent in terms of sympathetic joy.

This characteristic is highly evident since student nurses cooperate with nursing team members and other health care providers by providing sincere help and support (M=3.79), they express pleasure when patients succeed in obtaining medical care and regain their health (M=3.70), and maintain and encourage good relationships between nurses and others.

It is worthy to note, that student nurses appreciate the importance of others in the performance of their tasks. This means that they find joy in working with others

and are willing to collaborate with them for the welfare of their patients. Further, good relationships are integral to nursing care since most nursing actions are greatly dependent on the trust between nurse and the patient.

In addition, nursing students respond gladly by providing help and support to others as they struggle to do good (M=3.64) and create happy and peaceful health care environment (M=3.62). This means that student nurses provided nursing care that promotes greater opportunities for independence and recovery among patients.

**Table 4**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of**  
**Equanimity**

<b>Equanimity</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1. I understand that everyone experiences good and evil in accordance with their actions without prejudice or preference.	3.52	Strongly Agree	4
2. I view right or wrong by means of principles reasons and equity.	3.62	Strongly Agree	2
3. I understand patient's experience according to the cause of their action	3.58	Strongly Agree	3
4. I see things as they are with mind that are even, steady, firm and fair or inequality in health care delivery system.	3.49	Agree	5
5. I provide care based on a holistic approach that considers physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects.	3.71	Strongly Agree	1
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.58</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

#### **Equanimity**

Table 4 shows that nursing students strongly agree that they possess the characteristics of equanimity based on the composite mean score of 3.58.

It can be noted that student nurses provide care that is based on a holistic approach that considers physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects (M=3.71); view right or wrong by means of principles reasons and equity (M=3.62); and understand patient's experience according to the cause of their action (M=3.58). Nurses are known to provide total care to patients since they consider the individual as a holistic human being. All dimensions of care are being considered in order to promote quality of care among their patients. The study of Rassin (2008) attested that fundamental values among nurses are concerning human dignity, equality among patients and prevention of suffering.

On the other hand, least among the items pertaining to "I see things as they are with mind that are even, steady, firm and fair" with a mean score of 3.49 and

interpreted as agree. This suggests that because of some factors in the present health care delivery system in the present health care status in the country, inequality is observed by these student nurses.

**Table 5**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of**  
**Responsibility**

<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1. I promote an environment in which values and beliefs are respected	3.78	Strongly Agree	1
2. I hold in confidence personal information and uses judgment in sharing information	3.70	Strongly Agree	3
3. I carry personal responsibility and accountability for nursing practice	3.63	Strongly Agree	5
4. I assume major roles in implementing acceptable standards of clinical nursing practice	3.67	Strongly Agree	4
5. I sustain a cooperative relationship with fellow students	3.77	Strongly Agree	2
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.58</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

### **Responsibility**

The composite mean score value of 3.58 as revealed in table 5 suggests that nursing students are morally competent in terms of responsibility.

This characteristic is highly evident since nursing students promote an environment in which values and beliefs are respected (M=3.78); sustain a cooperative relationship with fellow students (M=3.77) and hold in confidence personal information and uses judgment in sharing information (M=3.70). As suggested by the findings in the other tables, the respondents are respectful of patients as well as their significant others and value privacy and confidentiality of information.

This means that student nurses consider the overall integrity of their patients and maintain not only the physical characteristics but also the personal integrity.

On the other hand, nursing students assume major role in implementing acceptable standards of clinical nursing practice (M=3.67) and carry personal responsibility and accountability for nursing practice (M=3.63). The findings revealed provision of safe care which is evident among student nurses of Lyceum of the Philippines University - Batangas. Taylor (as cited in Rassin, 2008), posited that nurses who have skills in moral competence can be trusted to act in ways that advance the interest of patients. They can be accountable or expected to justify actions for the practice to themselves, the patients, the care giving team and society. They also act as



effective patient advocates and mediate ethical conflict among patients, significant others, health care team members, and other interested patients.

**Table 6**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of Discipline**

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1. I am aware of my roles and functions	3.78	Strongly Agree	2
2. I organize my life for personal growth	3.70	Strongly Agree	3
3. I conduct myself properly in the social environment	3.68	Strongly Agree	4
4. I control exploitative acts in performing my roles	3.66	Strongly Agree	5
5. I value my ability to perform helpful acts to my patients	3.81	Strongly Agree	1
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.73</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

### **Discipline**

Table 6 presents the moral competence of nursing students in terms of discipline. The results revealed that these students are highly disciplined as evidenced by the composite mean score of 3.73.

The results attested that nursing students value their ability to perform helpful acts to their patients (M=3.81); aware of their roles and functions (M=3.78) and organize their life for personal growth (M=3.70). The results suggest that nurses understand the responsibilities that they have and the need for continuous improvement through professional growth.

In addition, nurses conduct themselves properly in the social environment (M=3.68) and control exploitative acts in performing their roles (M=3.66). These characteristics imply that student nurses of LPU understand proper decorum and appropriate actions according to the standards of nursing care. According to the Board of Nursing, Board Resolution No. 220, section 11, registered nurses must perform their professional duties in conformity with existing laws, rules regulations, measures, and generally accepted principles of moral conduct and proper decorum and not allow themselves to be used in advertisement that should demean the image of the profession.

**Table 7**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of**  
**Honesty**

Honesty	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I respect my patients as a human beings	3.95	Strongly Agree	1
2. I uphold the truth and avoid deceit	3.85	Strongly Agree	3
3. I strive to be sincere with others	3.89	Strongly Agree	2
4. I clear up any misunderstandings when they occur	3.78	Strongly Agree	4
5. I avoid gossip, back-biting, harsh words and idle speech	3.60	Strongly Agree	5
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

### Honesty

Table 7 shows that nursing students strongly agree that they possess the characteristics of equanimity based on the composite mean score of 3.81.

It can be noted that nursing students respect their patients as human beings (M=3.95); strive to be sincere with others (M=3.89) and uphold the truth and avoid deceit (M=3.85). Also, nurses clear up any misunderstandings when they occur (M=3.78) and avoid gossip, back-biting, harsh words and idle speech (M=3.60). This confirms the study of Jormsri et al. (2005), which states that honesty focuses on human respect that upholds the truth, avoids deceit and strives to be sincere with others. Nurses must practice honesty in their actions especially when they face choices of actions that can be either honest or dishonest.

**Table 8**  
**Moral Competence of Nursing Students in terms of**  
**Respect for Human Values, Dignity and Rights**

Respect for Human Values, Dignity and Rights	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I understand that my patients are both equal and unique	3.85	Strongly Agree	1.5
2. I plan and decide in respect of my patient	3.79	Strongly Agree	5
3. I protect patient's rights	3.85	Strongly Agree	1.5
4. I respect one's dignity and humanity	3.92	Strongly Agree	3.5
5. I understand that everyone has their own values	3.92	Strongly Agree	3.5
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

### Respect for Human Values, Dignity and Rights

The composite mean score value of 3.81 as revealed in table 8 suggests that nurses are morally competent in terms of respect for human values, dignity and rights.

The characteristics of “I understand that their patients are both equal and unique” and “I protect patient’s rights” had a similar weighted mean score value of 3.85 followed by “I respect one’s dignity and humanity” and “I understand that everyone has their own values” which both have 3.92 weighted mean.

Respect, humanity, and dignity are the foundations of the nursing practice. Focusing on these three components enables nurses to understand and more fully appreciate patient’s personal experiences on health, thus allowing them to develop approaches to help patients and support them. With these characteristics, Lycean nurses may value each person as individuals, respect their aspirations and commitments in life and seek to understand their priorities, needs, abilities and limits. Tiwattananon (2007) stated that there must be respect for people’s dignity and humanity because everyone has his/her own values. Moral competence consists of attributes derived from personal, social and professional values.

**Table 9**  
**Summary of the Moral Competence of Nursing Students**

<b>Moral Competence of Nursing Students</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Loving Kindness	3.77	Strongly Agree	3
Compassion	3.63	Strongly Agree	6
Sympathetic Joy	3.68	Strongly Agree	5
Equanimity	3.58	Strongly Agree	7
Responsibility	3.73	Strongly Agree	4
Honesty	3.81	Strongly Agree	1.5
Respect for Human Values Dignity and Rights	3.81	Strongly Agree	1.5
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	

Table 9 shows that student nurses are morally competent with a grand mean of 3.72. Results indicate that nurses are honest and they respect human values dignity and rights sharing same weighted mean of 3.81; Loving kindness (M=3.77); Responsibility (M= 3.73); Sympathetic joy (M=3.68); Compassion (M= 3.63); and Equanimity (M= 3.58) being the least.

Results further imply that the nursing students have internalized their knowledge on Republic Act No. 9173 or the “Philippine Nursing Act of 2002” (<http://nurseslabs.com/code-of-ethics-for-registered-nurses/>) on the Code of Ethics for Nurses in the Philippines; devised as a guide for carrying out nursing responsibilities which would tackle difficult issues and decisions that a profession might be facing, and give clear instruction of what action would be considered ethical or right in the given circumstance particularly in Section 5 which states that nurses must uphold the rights of individuals.

These findings were supported by the study of Shahriari et al (2013) which revealed that based on the humanistic nature of nursing, common values in nursing protect human dignity and respect to the patients. Recognizing and definition of ethical values can help to improve nursing practice and develop codes of ethics.

Nursing students were taught to respect human values and dignity and aside from the inherited values as Filipinos, these are also included on the patient bill of rights. Provision of privacy whenever needed, and maintaining confidentiality of patient conditions and management are some of the nurse's moral competence.

Filipino nurses were honest and should be honest to promote patient recovery and welfare. From the assessment and gathering of data up to nursing management and promotion of patient health, they are entailed to write or record only those things that they see and what they did to patient

### **Analysis of the Findings to the Nursing Practice**

In light of the findings of the study, implications are hereby endorsed to improve the moral competence of nursing students which is essential in the provision of safe and effective nursing care.

The findings imply that student nurses practicing in Batangas are morally competent in terms of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights. This finding further implies that they understand the extent of their future roles and functions and will work in accordance to the standards of nursing practice. Based on this, it can be expected that these student nurses will promote care for the welfare of their patients and their significant others.

Nursing students who are morally competent will influence and greatly create an impact to the nursing practice and to the community as well. Nurses who give high regard to respect and dignity is essential to enable them to undertake care humanely. Also, nurses who are ethically sound decide on what is fair and just to patients. With these kinds of nurses in the health care environment, high level of wellness can be assured to the public in general.

### **Program towards Enhancement of Moral Competence of Nursing Students**

Based on the findings, a proposed program is hereby presented to enhance the moral competence of the nursing students in Lyceum of the Philippines University.

**Table 10**  
**Proposed Program to Enhance the Moral Competence**  
**of Nursing Students**

Objective	Program	Strategies/Activities	Person Responsible	Expected Outcome
To enhance nurses' understanding on patient's conditions and circumstances	Patient Assessment Program for the concept of suffering, empathy and acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct patient needs assessment survey</li> <li>• Include in the related learning experiences (RLEs) of nursing students clinical activities focused on understanding clients' needs (e.g. need assessment form)</li> <li>• Conduct seminar on understanding client's behaviour</li> </ul>	Dean Faculty Administrators Training Officers Students Graduates	<p>Periodical needs assessment will be conducted</p> <p>Clinical Instructors will develop a need assessment form to be implemented during RLE of nursing students</p> <p>100% of identified nursing students and graduates will participate in the seminar</p>
To enhance nurses' ability to provide a peaceful environment essential for recovery of patients	Nurses Development Program on Supportive Patient Modalities that will enhance patient equanimity in health care delivery system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct Up-to-Date Trainings on Supportive Nursing Interventions</li> <li>• Include in the journal article requirement of nursing student's topics on helpful strategies and interventions for patients focused on health care delivery system</li> </ul>	Dean Faculty Administrators Training Officers Students Graduates	<p>100% of the target nurses will attend the trainings</p> <p>Strategies focused on environment will be included in the clinical focus</p>
To enhance nurses' sense of responsibility and accountability	Self-Awareness program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensify individual classroom and clinical requirements</li> <li>• Conduct seminar on Standards of Nursing Practice</li> </ul>	Dean Faculty Administrators Training Officers Students Graduates	<p>More individual reports will be submitted by nursing students</p> <p>100% attendance of nurses and less reports of nursing errors</p>

To enhance collegial attitude among nurses	Staff/Student Development Program on Interpersonal Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct team building activities for nurses and nursing students</li> </ul>		Increase patients' outcomes due to collegial relationships
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### CONCLUSIONS

Nursing students of Lyceum of the Philippines University- Batangas are morally competent and are capable of providing nursing care with conscience and within ethical values and standards of nursing care. However, such competence of student nurses in patient assessment for the concept of suffering, empathy and acceptance and patient equanimity in health care delivery system, need further enhancement since competency can change and vary significantly over time. Hence, programs are proposed towards enhancement of moral competence of nursing students and graduates.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The nurse educators should include in Elective Course subjects and Nursing Leadership and Management topics on moral competence and the eight variables of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, responsibility, discipline, honesty and respect for human values, dignity and rights. The nursing professional organizations should contribute to the promotion of moral competence through seminars and trainings among members. Health care institutions should review existing policies that will affect or contribute development and enhancement of moral competence among health care professionals. Health Care Institutions should continuously develop programs that are focused on the implications suggested by the findings of the study on nursing practice. The proposed program is hereby recommended. Future researchers should conduct similar studies to explore on other factors that may elicit the moral competence of students as well as professional nurses. Longitudinal studies may also be conducted to have repeated observations and understanding on the nature of moral competence among student nurses.

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