Ethical Impact of Lethal Injections on the Nursing Profession

By: Julie Grant
Background

• **1971** – *Furman v. Georgia* stayed all executions because they violated the 8th amendment

• **1977** – Jay Chapman (MD) developed the 3-drug lethal injection (LI) protocol

• **1982** – 1st “clinical trial” of LI

• Out of 1,000 LIs 40 have resulted in painful complications

• Nurse involvement in LI procedures is hidden behind state and federal secrecy laws
The Federal Death Penalty Abolition Act of 2013

(H.R. 3741)

A bill to abolish the death penalty under Federal Law

Introduction

Dec. 12, 2013 - by D. Representative Donna Edwards for MD’s 4th congressional district

Support

13 Democratic cosponsors, National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty & Amnesty International

Obstacles

Largely Republican support of the death penalty

Where is the Bill?

What is the Problem?

Romell Broom

Angel Diaz
Nursing Policy

Nurse participation in executions, either directly or indirectly, is viewed as contrary to the fundamental goals and ethical traditions of the nursing profession.

ANA calls for nurses to be active in political, scientific, legal, social and ethical dialogue that could lead to legislation abolishing the death penalty.
Nursing Reality

Lambright v. Lewis (1996): Any healthcare worker who participates in an execution cannot be penalized by their licensing board.

Illinois Law: Administration of LIs and all ancillary functions cannot be considered the practice of medicine.
Ethics of Lethal Injections

**Nonmaleficence**
- Do not kill
- Do not cause pain or suffering
- Do not incapacitate
- Do not cause offense
- Do not deprive others of a good life

**Beneficence**
- Prevent harm from occurring to others

**Autonomy**
- Formal justice

**Justice**
- An eye for an eye and the whole world would be blind
Can JUSTICE be served by a fundamentally biased system?
### Nursing Code of Ethics

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**Image:** A close-up of hands, symbolizing care and support.
Imagery of medicine is used to justify capital punishment.

Without the “respectability” medicine gives to the death penalty the US would cease its use.
References


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