THE AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS (2015):

Florence Nightingale believed that a nurse’s ethical duty was first and foremost to care for the patient. This precept underpins every discussion of ethics in nursing up until today. As health care has become more complex and the variety of circumstances nurses face have become more challenging, considerable elaboration on that fundamental principle is required.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) adopted its first formal code of ethics in 1950. Over the years, many of the specifics have evolved and been clarified, yet the essentials remain. (The International Council of Nurses (ICN) also has had a Code of Ethics for Nurses since 1953.) The Code has since been through two thoughtful and lengthy revision processes, which included seeking input from nursing leaders and staff nurses alike, and developing examples of how the new Code could be used in specific clinical situations. The most recent revised document, known as the Code of Ethics for Nurses With Interpretive Statements, gained final organizational approval in January 2015.

According to ANA, the Code “is foundational to nursing theory, practice, and praxis in its expression of the values, virtues, and obligations that shape, guide, and inform nursing as a profession,” and it serves the following purposes:

- It is a succinct statement of the ethical values, obligations, duties, and professional ideals of nurses individually and collectively.
- It is the profession’s non-negotiable ethical standard.
- It is an expression of nursing’s own understanding of its commitment to society.