

Strengthening Hospital Management Through Ethical Leadership and Professional Integrity

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Abstract

Ethical leadership and professional integrity have become increasingly important in hospital management due to the complex responsibilities associated with healthcare delivery, professional accountability, organisational fairness, and patient care. This article examines the role of ethical leadership and professional integrity in strengthening hospital management, with particular attention to ethical competence, organisational justice, ethical climate, moral courage, and healthcare quality. The analysis identifies several challenges affecting hospital management, including inconsistent ethical leadership, difficulties in maintaining professional integrity, weak ethical climates, perceptions of organisational injustice, and ethical pressures that may contribute to moral distress among healthcare professionals. The article further discusses the importance of leadership consistency, managerial accountability, professional ethical competence, fairness, and supportive organisational conditions in addressing these challenges. Strategic recommendations emphasise the establishment of clear ethical leadership practices, continuous ethical development, stronger organisational justice, supportive ethical climates, and the integration of ethical management with healthcare quality improvement. Overall, the article demonstrates that effective hospital management requires ethical principles to be embedded within leadership behaviour, professional practice, organisational systems, and quality management. Strengthening these dimensions can enhance professional responsibility, employee trust, ethical decision making, organisational effectiveness, and the quality of healthcare services.

Keywords: *Ethics, Leadership, Integrity, Management, Healthcare*

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1. Introduction

Hospitals operate in an environment where managerial decisions have direct implications for employees, patients, families, and the wider community. Unlike many other organisations, hospital management involves complex decisions concerning patient welfare, professional responsibilities, limited resources, confidentiality, fairness, safety, and quality of care. Ethical considerations are therefore closely connected with the effectiveness of hospital management. Leaders are expected not only to achieve organisational objectives but also to demonstrate honesty, fairness, accountability, respect, and consistency when making decisions. Brown et al. (2005) conceptualised ethical leadership as the demonstration and promotion of normatively appropriate conduct through personal behaviour, communication, reinforcement, and decision making. This perspective suggests that leaders influence ethical behaviour through both their personal example and their management practices. Kalshoven et al. (2011) further identified several dimensions of ethical leadership, including fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, and concern for sustainability. Within hospitals, these characteristics are particularly significant because healthcare professionals regularly encounter situations requiring ethical judgement. Suhonen et al. (2011) observed that organisational ethics in healthcare involves leadership, management, ethical climate, moral distress, and ethical challenges. Strengthening ethical leadership should consequently be considered an important component of responsible and effective hospital management.

Ethical leadership becomes particularly meaningful in healthcare because leaders can influence the working environment in which professionals deliver patient care. Hospital managers and clinical leaders establish expectations concerning acceptable behaviour, communication, professional responsibility, and decision making. Their actions may consequently influence how healthcare professionals understand and respond to ethical concerns encountered during daily practice. Makaroff et al. (2014) found that ethical nursing leadership requires responsiveness to practitioners and organisational contexts, together with support for ethical discussion and practice. Such leadership creates opportunities for employees to raise concerns, participate in decisions, and seek guidance when facing difficult situations. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) similarly demonstrated that ethical leadership in nursing can contribute to professional development and influence the quality of healthcare services. From a wider healthcare perspective, leadership style has also been associated with important dimensions of quality of care (Sfantou et al., 2017). Wong et al. (2013) found evidence linking positive relational nursing leadership with favourable patient outcomes, including higher patient satisfaction and lower levels of selected adverse outcomes. These findings demonstrate that leadership should not be separated from ethical responsibility. Hospital leaders who combine managerial competence with ethical conduct can strengthen professional relationships, support appropriate decision making, and create organisational conditions that encourage healthcare professionals to maintain high standards of patient care.

Professional integrity provides another important foundation for effective hospital management because healthcare professionals are entrusted with responsibilities that require honesty, accountability, competence, and commitment to professional standards. Integrity involves maintaining consistency between ethical principles, professional responsibilities, and actual behaviour, particularly when individuals face competing demands or difficult decisions. Within healthcare environments, professional values guide interactions with patients, colleagues, managers, and other stakeholders. Monroe (2019) demonstrated that nurses' professional values are influenced by professional experience and ethics education, indicating that ethical development remains important throughout professional practice. Lechasseur et al. (2018) further explained that ethical competence incorporates ethical knowledge, awareness, reflection, decision making, behaviour, and action. These capabilities are essential because healthcare professionals may encounter situations in which organisational expectations, resource constraints, patient preferences, and professional responsibilities do not align easily. Numminen et al. (2019) also highlighted moral courage as an important element of nursing practice, particularly when professionals must act according to ethical principles despite possible difficulties. Professional integrity should therefore be supported by organisational structures that allow healthcare employees to express concerns and make responsible decisions. Hospital management can strengthen integrity by establishing clear ethical expectations, providing appropriate support, encouraging professional development, and ensuring that ethical standards are consistently applied across organisational levels.

The ethical climate within a hospital can substantially influence how healthcare professionals perceive their responsibilities and respond to ethical situations. An ethical climate reflects shared perceptions concerning how ethical matters are recognised, discussed, and addressed within the workplace. Olson (1998) demonstrated that

hospital ethical climate involves relationships among nurses, peers, patients, managers, physicians, and the organisation itself. These relationships can either support or restrict professionals when they encounter ethically difficult circumstances. Pauly et al. (2009) found an inverse relationship between nurses' perceptions of ethical climate and moral distress, suggesting that a more supportive ethical environment may reduce difficulties associated with acting according to professional values. Ethical climate has also been associated with professional competence, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions among nurses (Numminen et al., 2015). These findings are important for hospital management because ethical responsibility cannot depend exclusively on individual character. Even professionals with strong personal values may experience difficulty maintaining ethical practice when organisational systems discourage open communication or provide inadequate managerial support. Bayer and Şahin (2020) further identified relationships among perceived ethical leadership, organisational justice, and turnover intention among hospital nurses. Creating a strong ethical climate therefore requires hospital leaders to demonstrate fairness, transparency, consistency, and respect while establishing organisational processes that enable employees to discuss ethical concerns without unnecessary barriers.

Ethical challenges become more difficult when healthcare professionals recognise an appropriate course of action but experience organisational or situational barriers that prevent them from acting accordingly. Such circumstances can contribute to moral distress, which has received considerable attention in healthcare ethics research. Epstein et al. (2019) demonstrated the importance of understanding and measuring moral distress among healthcare professionals because it can arise from complex clinical and organisational circumstances. Prompahakul and Epstein (2020) similarly showed that moral distress is an important concern among nurses across different cultural and healthcare environments. These findings indicate that ethical problems cannot always be resolved through individual professional competence alone. Organisational conditions, management decisions, workplace relationships, resource availability, and leadership behaviour may influence whether healthcare professionals can act consistently with their ethical judgement. Pauly et al. (2009) also connected moral distress with perceptions of the ethical climate in nursing practice, reinforcing the importance of organisational support. Hospital leaders therefore carry responsibility for creating conditions that enable employees to communicate ethical concerns and seek appropriate assistance. Ethical leadership can contribute to this environment by encouraging dialogue, demonstrating fairness, recognising professional judgement, and ensuring that organisational priorities do not unnecessarily prevent employees from fulfilling legitimate professional responsibilities.

Maintaining fairness and organisational justice represents another significant responsibility for hospital leaders. Healthcare organisations employ professionals from different disciplines who work within complex hierarchies and depend on management decisions concerning workloads, schedules, responsibilities, recognition, resources, and career opportunities. Perceptions of unfair treatment may weaken trust in management and negatively influence relationships within the organisation. Ethical leadership offers a mechanism for strengthening fairness because ethical leaders are expected to make decisions consistently, explain their reasoning, listen to employees, and avoid inappropriate personal interests. Kalshoven et al. (2011) identified fairness and integrity as central dimensions of ethical leadership, together with people orientation and power sharing. These behaviours are highly relevant within hospitals, where employees need confidence that organisational decisions are made responsibly. Bayer and Şahin (2020) found a relationship between perceived ethical leadership and organisational justice among nurses working in a general hospital, while their study also examined the relationship of these factors with turnover intention. Ethical leadership can therefore contribute to hospital management by strengthening employees' perceptions that decisions and workplace practices are fair. When fairness becomes part of organisational culture, healthcare professionals may develop stronger trust in leaders and greater confidence in raising concerns, participating in decisions, and maintaining their professional responsibilities.

Patient safety and quality of care provide further reasons for integrating ethical leadership and professional integrity into hospital management. Although clinical knowledge and technical competence are fundamental to healthcare delivery, organisational leadership also shapes the conditions under which professionals provide care. Leaders influence staffing priorities, communication practices, teamwork, professional development, accountability, and the willingness of employees to report concerns. Wong et al. (2013) identified relationships between nursing leadership practices and several patient outcomes, demonstrating that leadership can have implications beyond employee attitudes. Sfantou et al. (2017) similarly concluded from a systematic review that leadership styles in healthcare settings are associated with measures of healthcare quality. Ethical leadership adds an important dimension because it emphasises responsible behaviour, fairness, communication, and accountability

rather than organisational performance alone. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) demonstrated that ethical leadership in nursing can generate outcomes associated with professional progress and the healthcare environment. At the individual level, ethical competence also enables professionals to recognise ethical dimensions, reflect on available choices, and take appropriate action (Lechasseur et al., 2018). Consequently, strengthening hospital performance requires an organisational environment in which managerial effectiveness and ethical responsibility operate together to support professional practice and patient centred care.

By 2020, the growing complexity of healthcare delivery had made ethical leadership and professional integrity increasingly important for hospital management. Healthcare organisations faced pressure to maintain quality services while managing workforce demands, technological change, resource constraints, organisational accountability, and increasingly complex patient needs. These pressures can create tension between operational priorities and professional responsibilities, making ethical leadership essential for maintaining trust and responsible decision making. Brown et al. (2005) established that leaders can influence ethical conduct through role modelling and reinforcement, while Makaroff et al. (2014) demonstrated the importance of ethical leadership specifically within nursing contexts. Evidence concerning hospital ethical climate further indicates that organisational environments influence professional practice, job related outcomes, and experiences of moral distress (Olson, 1998; Numminen et al., 2015). More recent evidence available by 2020 continued to demonstrate the importance of moral distress and organisational support within healthcare practice (Epstein et al., 2019; Prompahakul & Epstein, 2020). Accordingly, this article examines how ethical leadership and professional integrity can strengthen hospital management by supporting ethical decision making, professional responsibility, organisational justice, positive ethical climate, employee relationships, and quality healthcare delivery. Greater understanding of these relationships can provide a stronger foundation for responsible and sustainable hospital management.

2. Literature Review

Ethical leadership and professional integrity have received increasing attention in healthcare because hospital performance depends not only on clinical competence but also on responsible leadership, professional behaviour, and a supportive organisational environment. Ethical principles influence how hospital leaders communicate with employees, distribute responsibilities, make decisions, manage conflicts, and respond to concerns involving patient care. At the same time, healthcare professionals require strong professional values and ethical competence to manage situations involving competing responsibilities and organisational demands. Previous studies have associated ethical leadership and ethical climate with organisational justice, professional development, moral distress, employee attitudes, and healthcare quality (Makaroff et al., 2014; Numminen et al., 2015; Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al., 2018; Bayer & Şahin, 2020). These relationships demonstrate the importance of considering ethics as part of hospital management rather than solely as an individual professional responsibility. Accordingly, this literature review examines four interconnected areas: ethical leadership in hospital management, professional integrity and ethical competence, ethical climate and organisational justice, and the contribution of ethical leadership to healthcare quality and organisational performance.

2.1 Ethical Leadership in Hospital Management

Leadership within healthcare organisations carries significant ethical responsibilities because managerial decisions can influence employees, professional practices, resource allocation, and ultimately the quality of patient care. Ethical leadership provides an important foundation for understanding how leaders can guide appropriate behaviour within complex organisational environments. Brown et al. (2005) conceptualised ethical leadership through the demonstration of appropriate conduct and the promotion of such behaviour through communication, decision making, and reinforcement. This perspective indicates that hospital leaders influence ethical standards through both their personal behaviour and managerial practices. Treviño et al. (2003) similarly demonstrated that executive ethical leadership involves characteristics such as honesty, integrity, concern for people, openness, and the communication of ethical standards. Within hospital settings, these characteristics become particularly important because employees regularly encounter situations requiring professional judgement and responsible decision making. Kalshoven et al. (2011) expanded the understanding of ethical leadership by identifying

dimensions including fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, and sustainability. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that ethical hospital leadership extends beyond compliance with formal rules. It requires leaders to establish clear expectations, demonstrate appropriate conduct, encourage responsible behaviour, and create conditions that enable healthcare professionals to perform their responsibilities according to accepted ethical and professional standards.

Applying ethical leadership within healthcare requires particular attention to the relationships between managers and healthcare professionals. Employees are more likely to recognise ethical expectations when leaders demonstrate consistency between their stated values and actual behaviour. Makaroff et al. (2014) found that ethical nursing leadership involves responsiveness to practitioners, consideration of organisational context, and support for ethical practice. This suggests that hospital leaders should provide employees with opportunities to discuss concerns and participate in decisions affecting professional responsibilities. Storch et al. (2013) similarly emphasised the importance of ethical leadership within healthcare organisations and the need to develop organisational conditions that support ethical practice. Leadership behaviour may also affect the professional development of healthcare employees. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) demonstrated that ethical leadership in nursing can generate positive outcomes involving professional progress and healthcare delivery. Furthermore, Denier et al. (2010) found that leadership can influence the ethical climate perceived by nurses, indicating that managerial behaviour contributes to the ethical characteristics of the workplace. These findings suggest that ethical leadership should be integrated into hospital management practices through communication, participation, fairness, and consistent ethical guidance. Leaders who demonstrate these characteristics can strengthen trust and provide healthcare professionals with clearer direction when managing complex organisational and patient related responsibilities.

2.2 Professional Integrity and Ethical Competence in Healthcare

Professional integrity is fundamental to healthcare because patients and organisations depend on healthcare professionals to act responsibly, honestly, competently, and consistently with established professional values. Integrity is particularly important when professionals encounter situations in which organisational pressures, patient preferences, limited resources, and professional responsibilities create competing demands. Horton et al. (2007) identified professional values as an important component of nursing practice, demonstrating that values influence how professionals understand their responsibilities and relationships with patients. Poorchangizi et al. (2019) similarly found that professional values remain central to nursing practice and can be influenced by personal and professional characteristics. Ethical values therefore need to be strengthened throughout professional development rather than treated only as principles introduced during initial education. Numminen et al. (2010) also highlighted the importance of ethical codes in nursing practice, although awareness of ethical codes does not automatically guarantee their effective application. Professionals must be capable of interpreting ethical expectations within actual healthcare situations. Gallagher (2010) emphasised courage as an important virtue in nursing because professionals may need to act according to ethical principles even when doing so involves personal or organisational difficulties. Professional integrity consequently requires both knowledge of ethical standards and a willingness to maintain those standards when facing challenging circumstances.

Ethical competence extends professional integrity by enabling healthcare professionals to recognise, analyse, and respond appropriately to ethical situations. Rather than depending solely on personal values, ethical competence combines knowledge, reflection, decision making, communication, and responsible action. Lechasseur et al. (2018) identified several dimensions of ethical competence in nursing, including ethical sensitivity, knowledge, reflection, decision making, behaviour, and action. These dimensions demonstrate that ethical practice requires healthcare professionals to understand both the ethical implications of situations and the consequences of available decisions. Kulju et al. (2016) similarly examined ethical competence among healthcare professionals and highlighted its importance in professional practice. Moral courage represents another significant capability because employees may recognise an ethically appropriate action but hesitate when organisational or interpersonal consequences are expected. Numminen et al. (2019) demonstrated that moral courage is a meaningful component of nursing practice and requires further support within healthcare organisations. Lachman et al. (2012) also connected moral courage with the responsibility to address ethical concerns in nursing practice. Hospital management therefore plays an important role in supporting professional integrity by providing ethical guidance, continuing professional development, appropriate reporting mechanisms, and managerial support. Strengthening

ethical competence enables healthcare professionals to make more responsible decisions while maintaining professional standards under demanding organisational conditions.

2.3 Ethical Climate and Organisational Justice in Hospitals

A supportive ethical climate provides an organisational foundation that can encourage healthcare professionals to maintain ethical standards in their daily work. Ethical climate concerns shared perceptions regarding how ethical matters are understood, discussed, and managed within an organisation. Olson (1998) established an important foundation for hospital ethical climate research by identifying relationships involving nurses, peers, patients, managers, physicians, and the hospital itself. These relationships indicate that ethical behaviour is shaped partly by the organisational environment in which healthcare professionals work. Schluter et al. (2008) subsequently demonstrated through a systematic review that ethical climate is relevant to nursing practice and organisational conditions. When employees perceive their working environment as supportive and ethically responsible, they may feel more confident discussing concerns and participating in difficult decisions. Pauly et al. (2009) found an inverse relationship between ethical climate and moral distress among nurses, suggesting that stronger ethical environments may reduce difficulties experienced when professionals are unable to act according to their ethical judgement. Yusof et al., (2020) similarly examined moral distress and ethical climate among healthcare professionals and identified the organisational environment as an important consideration. Hospital leaders should therefore recognise that ethical practice depends on both individual professional values and organisational conditions that support responsible behaviour.

Fairness within organisational decisions represents another important element of an ethical hospital environment. Employees continuously experience management decisions involving workload, scheduling, responsibilities, promotion, recognition, resource allocation, and opportunities for professional development. Perceptions of unfairness in these areas may reduce trust in management and weaken employee commitment. Colquitt et al. (2001) established that organisational justice incorporates several dimensions of fairness and is associated with important employee and organisational outcomes. Ethical leadership can strengthen perceptions of justice because ethical leaders are expected to communicate openly, apply standards consistently, and consider employee interests when making decisions. Mayer et al. (2009) demonstrated that ethical leadership can influence organisational behaviour through management processes and ethical role modelling. Within healthcare, Numminen et al. (2015) found that ethical climate is associated with nurses' professional competence, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. More directly, Bayer and Şahin (2020) identified significant relationships among perceived ethical leadership, organisational justice, and turnover intention among nurses in a general hospital. These findings demonstrate that ethical leadership and organisational justice are closely connected within healthcare management. Strengthening fairness, transparency, and consistency in managerial decisions can therefore contribute to a more supportive ethical climate while reinforcing employees' trust in hospital leadership.

2.4 Ethical Leadership, Healthcare Quality and Organisational Outcomes

Quality healthcare depends on more than clinical expertise because leadership practices influence the organisational conditions under which professionals deliver patient services. Hospital leaders affect communication, teamwork, employee participation, resource priorities, professional development, and accountability, all of which may influence service quality. Wong and Cummings (2007) identified relationships between nursing leadership and patient outcomes, providing early evidence that leadership practices can have consequences beyond employee performance. Wong et al. (2013) later demonstrated through a systematic review that positive relational leadership practices were associated with favourable patient outcomes, including patient satisfaction and selected safety outcomes. Sfantou et al. (2017) similarly found that leadership styles in healthcare settings are related to measures of healthcare quality. These findings reinforce the importance of leadership as an organisational mechanism for creating conditions that support professional care. Ethical leadership adds further value by emphasising fairness, integrity, accountability, communication, and responsible decision making. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) found that ethical leadership in nursing can contribute to professional progress and positive healthcare related outcomes. Hospital management should therefore recognise ethical leadership as an important component of quality management because leadership behaviour influences both the professional environment experienced by healthcare employees and the conditions surrounding patient care.

Organisational outcomes are also influenced by how healthcare professionals perceive their leaders and working environment. High levels of moral distress, dissatisfaction, weak organisational support, and perceived unfairness may affect employee commitment and willingness to remain within an organisation. Hamric et al. (2012) developed and tested the Moral Distress Scale Revised, reinforcing the importance of moral distress as a significant concern across healthcare professions. Epstein et al. (2019) further demonstrated the relevance of moral distress among healthcare professionals and provided evidence supporting its systematic assessment. Ethical climate can play an important role in this relationship because employees working within supportive ethical environments may experience stronger professional confidence and organisational attachment. Numminen et al. (2015) associated ethical climate with job satisfaction and turnover intentions, while Bayer and Şahin (2020) linked ethical leadership and organisational justice with turnover intention among hospital nurses. Professional integrity and moral courage further support employees in maintaining appropriate standards when organisational challenges arise (Numminen et al., 2019). Taken together, these findings indicate that ethical leadership, professional integrity, ethical climate, and organisational justice should not be treated as separate concerns. Their interaction can strengthen employee relationships, responsible decision making, professional practice, healthcare quality, and the overall effectiveness of hospital management.

3. Current Issues in Ethical Leadership and Professional Integrity in Hospital Management

Hospitals face increasingly complex ethical challenges as managers and healthcare professionals attempt to balance organisational requirements with professional responsibilities and quality patient care. Decisions involving fairness, accountability, resource allocation, employee relationships, professional judgement, and patient interests can create situations where ethical principles are difficult to maintain consistently. Evidence from healthcare settings indicates that ethical leadership, professional competence, ethical climate, organisational justice, and moral distress are closely connected with the working experiences of healthcare professionals (Numminen et al., 2015; Lechasseur et al., 2018; Bayat et al., 2019; Bayer & Şahin, 2020). These concerns demonstrate that ethical hospital management requires attention to both individual professional behaviour and organisational conditions. Four major issues are particularly important in understanding how ethical leadership and professional integrity can be strengthened within hospital management.

3.1 Inconsistent Ethical Leadership and Managerial Practices

Maintaining consistent ethical leadership represents a significant challenge within hospitals because leaders regularly make decisions involving different professional groups, competing organisational priorities, and limited resources. Ethical leadership requires more than personal honesty because leaders must translate ethical values into daily management practices involving communication, decision making, employee treatment, and accountability. Brown et al. (2005) established that ethical leadership involves both appropriate personal conduct and the active promotion of ethical behaviour among employees. However, differences between stated organisational values and actual managerial behaviour can weaken employees' confidence in leadership. Treviño et al. (2003) demonstrated that ethical leadership at the executive level requires integrity, concern for people, ethical awareness, and clear communication concerning expected standards. Within healthcare settings, these requirements can become difficult to maintain when managers experience pressure to meet financial, operational, and service objectives. Makaroff et al. (2014) further demonstrated that ethical leadership in nursing requires responsiveness to practitioners and sensitivity to organisational context. When leaders provide insufficient ethical guidance or fail to respond consistently to employee concerns, healthcare professionals may experience uncertainty about appropriate actions. Hospital management therefore faces the challenge of ensuring that ethical principles are consistently demonstrated across leadership levels rather than remaining limited to formal policies or organisational statements.

Variations in leadership behaviour may also influence how healthcare professionals perceive management support and ethical expectations. Kalshoven et al. (2011) identified fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, and sustainability as important dimensions of ethical leadership. Applying these dimensions consistently within hospital environments can be challenging because departments differ in workload, professional responsibilities, managerial structures, and patient care requirements. Employees may consequently

experience different standards of communication, participation, and managerial support across the same hospital. Denier et al. (2010) identified leadership as an important influence on the ethical climate experienced by nurses, reinforcing the connection between managerial behaviour and workplace ethics. Storch et al. (2013) similarly emphasised the importance of leadership in developing organisational environments that support ethical healthcare practice. More recent evidence indicates that ethical leadership is also connected with employees' perceptions of fairness within hospitals. Bayer and Şahin (2020) found significant relationships among perceived ethical leadership, organisational justice, and turnover intention among nurses working in a general hospital. Inconsistent ethical leadership can therefore create consequences extending beyond individual managerial relationships by affecting trust, perceptions of fairness, employee attitudes, and the wider ethical environment of the hospital.

3.2 Challenges in Maintaining Professional Integrity and Ethical Competence

Healthcare professionals frequently encounter situations where maintaining professional integrity becomes difficult because ethical responsibilities may conflict with organisational pressures, patient expectations, workload demands, or limited resources. Professional integrity requires individuals to act consistently with ethical principles and professional standards even when circumstances make appropriate action difficult. Numminen et al. (2010) demonstrated the importance of professional codes of ethics in guiding nursing practice, but knowledge of ethical codes alone does not ensure that healthcare professionals can successfully resolve complex situations. Ethical challenges may involve competing values that cannot be addressed simply by following standard procedures. Yusof et al., (2020) emphasised the importance of moral courage in nursing, particularly when professionals need to protect ethical values under difficult circumstances. Such courage becomes especially relevant when employees recognise inappropriate practices but are concerned about interpersonal or organisational consequences associated with raising concerns. Poorchangizi et al. (2019) further demonstrated the continuing importance of professional values among nurses and their relationship with professional characteristics. These findings indicate that professional integrity requires more than individual commitment. Hospital management must create organisational conditions in which healthcare professionals have sufficient knowledge, confidence, authority, and managerial support to maintain professional standards when difficult ethical situations arise.

Developing adequate ethical competence presents a related challenge because healthcare professionals require multiple capabilities to address increasingly complex clinical and organisational situations. Lechasseur et al. (2018) identified ethical sensitivity, knowledge, reflection, decision making, behaviour, and action as important elements of ethical competence. Weakness in any of these areas may limit the ability of professionals to recognise ethical concerns or determine appropriate responses. Furthermore, healthcare employees may understand what should be done but hesitate to act when they expect disagreement, criticism, or negative consequences. Numminen et al. (2019) identified moral courage as an important component of nursing practice, demonstrating the need for professionals to possess the confidence required to act according to ethical principles. Professional competence therefore needs to include both the ability to evaluate ethical situations and the willingness to respond appropriately. This creates an important management challenge because hospitals must support continuing ethical development while ensuring that organisational systems do not discourage responsible professional judgement. Without appropriate training, ethical guidance, communication channels, and managerial support, healthcare professionals may find it difficult to maintain professional integrity consistently. Strengthening ethical competence should therefore be considered an organisational responsibility alongside the personal responsibility of individual healthcare professionals.

3.3 Weak Ethical Climate and Perceptions of Organisational Injustice

The organisational environment can create significant barriers to ethical practice when healthcare professionals perceive insufficient support, poor communication, or limited opportunities to discuss ethical concerns. Ethical climate reflects how employees understand organisational expectations and relationships when dealing with ethical situations. Olson (1998) demonstrated that hospital ethical climate involves relationships among nurses, peers, patients, managers, physicians, and the hospital itself. Problems within these relationships can make ethical decision making more difficult because healthcare professionals depend on collaboration and organisational support when managing complex patient situations. Schluter et al. (2008) further identified ethical climate as an important consideration within nursing practice. A weak ethical climate can become particularly problematic when employees experience moral distress. Pauly et al. (2009) found an inverse relationship between nurses'

perceptions of ethical climate and moral distress, suggesting that less supportive ethical environments may be associated with greater difficulty in acting according to professional judgement. Bayat et al. (2019) similarly reported a reverse relationship between ethical climate and moral distress among nurses working in hospitals. These findings indicate that hospital ethical climate is not an abstract organisational characteristic. Instead, it can directly influence how healthcare professionals experience and manage ethical challenges during their daily responsibilities.

Perceived organisational injustice can further weaken the ethical climate when employees believe that managerial decisions are inconsistent or unfair. Hospital employees are affected by decisions concerning workload allocation, scheduling, promotion, recognition, responsibilities, access to resources, and opportunities for professional development. When such decisions are perceived as unfair, trust in leadership may decline and employees may become less confident in organisational processes. Colquitt et al. (2001) demonstrated that organisational justice incorporates different dimensions of fairness and has important relationships with employee attitudes and organisational outcomes. Ethical leadership can help address this concern by promoting transparent decision making and consistent treatment of employees. Mayer et al. (2009) showed that ethical leadership can influence organisational behaviour through role modelling and management processes. Within healthcare settings, Bayer and Şahin (2020) found that perceived ethical leadership was positively associated with organisational justice among hospital nurses, while organisational justice was negatively associated with turnover intention. Ethical climate has also been connected with job satisfaction and employee outcomes (Numminen et al., 2015; Asgari et al., 2019). Hospital management therefore faces the continuing challenge of maintaining fairness and transparency across different departments and professional groups while ensuring that managerial decisions reinforce rather than undermine organisational ethical values.

3.4 Ethical Pressures Affecting Healthcare Quality and Organisational Outcomes

Increasing pressure to maintain healthcare quality while managing organisational constraints creates another major ethical challenge for hospital management. Healthcare professionals are expected to provide safe and responsible patient care while simultaneously responding to workload demands, resource limitations, organisational procedures, and performance expectations. Leadership practices can influence whether these competing requirements are managed effectively. Wong and Cummings (2007) identified relationships between nursing leadership and patient outcomes, demonstrating that leadership conditions can influence the quality of healthcare delivery. Wong et al. (2013) subsequently found that positive relational leadership practices were associated with favourable patient outcomes, including patient satisfaction and selected safety outcomes. Sfantou et al. (2017) similarly identified relationships between leadership styles and healthcare quality measures. Ethical concerns emerge when organisational priorities create conditions in which healthcare professionals experience difficulty maintaining expected standards of care. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) demonstrated that ethical leadership can influence professional development and healthcare related outcomes. This suggests that weaknesses in ethical leadership may have consequences beyond employee relationships. Hospital leaders must therefore balance operational requirements with professional and ethical responsibilities to ensure that efficiency objectives do not unintentionally weaken the organisational conditions necessary for high quality patient care.

Moral distress represents a particularly important consequence when healthcare professionals recognise an ethically appropriate action but experience barriers that prevent them from acting accordingly. Persistent exposure to such situations may influence employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, professional commitment, and intentions to remain within the organisation. Hamric et al. (2012) strengthened the measurement of moral distress across healthcare professionals through development of the Moral Distress Scale Revised, illustrating the significance of this concern within healthcare environments. Epstein et al. (2019) further demonstrated the importance of systematically assessing moral distress among healthcare professionals. Evidence also indicates that organisational conditions can influence these experiences. Asgari et al. (2019) identified relationships among moral distress, ethical climate, and job satisfaction among critical care nurses, while Bayat et al. (2019) demonstrated that more positive perceptions of ethical climate were associated with lower moral distress. In addition, Bayer and Şahin (2020) connected ethical leadership and organisational justice with turnover intention among hospital nurses. These findings demonstrate that ethical pressures can influence both professional practice and organisational outcomes. Hospitals must therefore address moral distress, employee support, ethical communication, and leadership behaviour as interconnected management concerns rather than treating ethical difficulties solely as individual professional problems

4. Discussion on Ethical Leadership and Professional Integrity in Hospital Management

Ethical leadership and professional integrity provide an important foundation for strengthening hospital management in an increasingly complex healthcare environment. Effective management requires hospital leaders to balance organisational priorities with fairness, accountability, professional responsibility, and the delivery of quality patient care. Ethical behaviour should therefore be embedded within leadership practices, workplace relationships, decision making, and organisational systems rather than treated solely as an individual responsibility. Evidence suggests that leadership behaviour and ethical working environments can influence professional practice, employee attitudes, moral distress, and organisational outcomes (Pauly et al., 2009; Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al., 2018; Bayer & Şahin, 2020). Addressing these relationships requires greater attention to consistent ethical leadership, professional integrity, organisational justice, and the conditions that enable healthcare professionals to maintain appropriate standards of care. The following discussion considers how these dimensions can contribute to more responsible and effective hospital management.

4.1 Strengthening Consistency and Accountability in Ethical Leadership

Effective ethical leadership requires hospital managers to demonstrate consistency between the values promoted by the organisation and the behaviour demonstrated through daily management practices. Employees are more likely to recognise and follow ethical expectations when leaders communicate clearly, make fair decisions, and demonstrate personal responsibility for their actions. Brown et al. (2005) explained that ethical leadership involves both appropriate personal conduct and the active promotion of ethical behaviour through communication, reinforcement, and decision making. This perspective is particularly relevant within hospitals because managerial decisions frequently involve competing professional interests, patient requirements, resource limitations, and organisational objectives. Kalshoven et al. (2011) further identified fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, and role clarification as important dimensions of ethical leadership. These dimensions indicate that effective ethical leadership should be visible in routine management activities rather than limited to formal ethical policies. Leaders who explain decisions, encourage participation, and apply organisational standards consistently can provide clearer ethical direction for healthcare professionals. Consequently, hospital management should establish leadership practices that promote accountability and consistency across departments, ensuring that ethical values are demonstrated through actual managerial behaviour and not merely expressed through organisational statements or professional codes.

Creating meaningful relationships between leaders and healthcare professionals is equally important for translating ethical principles into everyday practice. Hospital employees frequently encounter situations that require professional judgement, and their willingness to communicate concerns can depend significantly on how leaders respond. Makaroff et al. (2014) demonstrated that ethical nursing leadership requires responsiveness to practitioners and sensitivity to the organisational context in which ethical practice occurs. Managers should therefore provide opportunities for healthcare professionals to communicate concerns and participate appropriately in decisions that affect their responsibilities. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) further found that ethical leadership can contribute to nurses' professional development and the quality of healthcare services. Such findings indicate that ethical leadership can produce benefits extending beyond compliance with organisational rules. Consistent support from leaders may strengthen professional confidence and encourage employees to act according to accepted ethical standards. Bayer and Şahin (2020) also found that perceived ethical leadership was positively associated with organisational justice among hospital nurses. Ethical leadership should therefore combine accountability with supportive relationships, enabling managers to maintain organisational standards while creating an environment where healthcare professionals feel respected and able to express legitimate ethical concerns.

4.2 Supporting Professional Integrity and Ethical Competence

Maintaining professional integrity requires healthcare professionals to possess both strong ethical values and the ability to apply those values within complex clinical and organisational situations. Professional codes provide important guidance, but effective ethical practice cannot depend solely on knowledge of formal standards. Healthcare professionals must interpret ethical responsibilities in situations involving competing patient interests, organisational demands, limited resources, and professional obligations. Numminen et al. (2010) highlighted the importance of ethical codes in nursing practice while demonstrating that ethical knowledge needs to be connected

with actual professional responsibilities. Gallagher (2010) further emphasised moral courage as an important component of ethical nursing practice because healthcare professionals may sometimes need to defend appropriate actions despite potential interpersonal or organisational difficulties. Professional integrity therefore involves consistency between ethical understanding and actual behaviour. Poorchangizi et al. (2019) also demonstrated the continuing importance of professional values within nursing practice. These findings suggest that hospitals should create conditions that enable professionals to maintain their ethical responsibilities rather than expecting individual employees to manage difficult ethical situations independently. Appropriate leadership support, clear responsibilities, continuing ethical education, and accessible mechanisms for discussing concerns can strengthen the ability of healthcare professionals to maintain professional integrity.

Developing ethical competence provides a practical mechanism for translating professional values into responsible decision making. Ethical competence involves more than identifying whether a situation is right or wrong because healthcare decisions frequently involve competing values and uncertain outcomes. Lechasseur et al. (2018) conceptualised ethical competence through dimensions involving ethical sensitivity, knowledge, reflection, decision making, behaviour, and action. These capabilities enable healthcare professionals to recognise ethical concerns, evaluate available alternatives, and determine appropriate responses. Moral courage complements these capabilities by supporting professionals when responsible action may involve disagreement or personal difficulty. Numminen et al. (2019) identified moral courage as an important component of nursing practice and emphasised the need to strengthen understanding of this capability within healthcare environments. Hospital management can support ethical competence by incorporating ethical development into professional training, leadership communication, team discussions, and organisational decision processes. Managers should also ensure that employees have access to appropriate guidance when difficult ethical situations arise. Strengthening both ethical competence and moral courage can reduce the gap between recognising an ethical responsibility and acting upon it, thereby supporting professional integrity across different levels of hospital operations.

4.3 Building Ethical Climate Through Fairness and Organisational Justice

A positive ethical climate can strengthen hospital management by creating an environment in which healthcare professionals understand organisational expectations and feel supported when dealing with ethical concerns. Ethical behaviour is influenced not only by individual professional values but also by relationships with colleagues, managers, physicians, patients, and the wider organisation. Olson (1998) demonstrated these multiple dimensions through the development of the Hospital Ethical Climate Survey, highlighting the organisational nature of ethical practice. When communication is open and ethical concerns can be discussed appropriately, healthcare professionals may be better positioned to manage difficult situations. In contrast, weak ethical environments can contribute to moral distress when professionals recognise an appropriate course of action but experience barriers to following it. Pauly et al. (2009) found that the intensity and frequency of moral distress were inversely associated with nurses' perceptions of ethical climate. This relationship demonstrates why hospital management should consider ethical climate as part of organisational performance. Establishing accessible communication channels, encouraging professional dialogue, and providing management support for ethical concerns can strengthen employees' confidence in organisational processes and create a more supportive environment for responsible professional practice.

Fairness in managerial decisions represents an essential component of this ethical environment because healthcare employees regularly experience decisions involving workload, schedules, responsibilities, recognition, promotion, and resource allocation. Perceptions of unfair treatment can weaken trust and create doubts regarding the ethical standards promoted by management. Colquitt et al. (2001) demonstrated that organisational justice involves multiple dimensions of fairness that can influence important employee attitudes and behaviours. Ethical leadership can strengthen these perceptions because leaders who provide explanations, communicate transparently, and apply standards consistently are more likely to be perceived as fair. Mayer et al. (2009) further demonstrated that ethical leadership can influence employee behaviour through managerial role modelling and organisational processes. Evidence from hospital settings provides additional support for this relationship. Bayer and Şahin (2020) reported that perceived ethical leadership was positively related to organisational justice among nurses and that organisational justice was negatively related to turnover intention. Fairness should therefore be integrated into routine hospital management rather than addressed only when conflicts arise. Transparent and

consistent decisions can strengthen organisational justice, reinforce ethical climate, and develop greater confidence in hospital leadership.

4.4 Enhancing Healthcare Quality Through Ethical Management Practices

Quality healthcare requires organisational conditions that allow professionals to perform their responsibilities safely, responsibly, and consistently with accepted standards of practice. Leadership has an important role in creating these conditions because managers influence communication, teamwork, resource priorities, employee participation, professional development, and accountability. Wong and Cummings (2007) identified relationships between nursing leadership and patient outcomes, indicating that leadership can have implications for the quality of healthcare delivery. Wong et al. (2013) further demonstrated through a systematic review that positive relational leadership practices were associated with favourable patient outcomes. Sfantou et al. (2017) similarly identified relationships between leadership styles and healthcare quality measures. Ethical leadership strengthens this relationship by adding fairness, integrity, responsibility, and ethical guidance to managerial practice. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) specifically identified ethical leadership as important for the professional progress of nurses and quality healthcare services. These findings suggest that quality improvement should not focus exclusively on clinical processes and technical performance. Hospital management should also consider whether leadership behaviour creates an ethical environment that enables healthcare professionals to communicate concerns, exercise appropriate judgement, and maintain professional standards when delivering patient care.

Reducing organisational conditions that contribute to moral distress is equally important for sustaining healthcare quality and workforce effectiveness. Persistent ethical difficulties may affect how healthcare professionals experience their work, particularly when organisational barriers prevent them from acting according to professional judgement. Hamric et al. (2012) demonstrated the significance of moral distress across healthcare professions through the development and testing of the Moral Distress Scale Revised. Epstein et al. (2019) subsequently strengthened understanding and measurement of moral distress among healthcare professionals, reinforcing its importance as an organisational and professional concern. Earlier evidence from Pauly et al. (2009) demonstrated that perceptions of stronger ethical climate were associated with lower levels of moral distress among registered nurses. Employee retention also deserves attention because leadership and fairness can influence employees' intentions to remain within healthcare organisations. Bayer and Şahin (2020) reported significant relationships among ethical leadership, organisational justice, and turnover intention among 234 nurses in a general hospital. Hospital performance should therefore be approached through an integrated ethical management perspective in which leadership behaviour, professional integrity, organisational justice, ethical climate, employee support, and quality care are treated as interconnected responsibilities.

5. Strategic Recommendations for Strengthening Ethical Hospital Management

Strengthening ethical hospital management requires a systematic approach that integrates ethical principles into leadership practices, professional responsibilities, organisational relationships, and healthcare quality. Hospitals should create working environments in which ethical behaviour is supported through clear leadership expectations, professional development, fair organisational practices, and appropriate mechanisms for addressing ethical concerns. Greater attention should also be given to the relationship between ethical climate and the experiences of healthcare professionals because organisational conditions can influence their ability to maintain professional responsibilities (Pauly et al., 2009; Asgari et al., 2019). Rather than treating ethics as an individual responsibility, hospital management should incorporate ethical considerations into organisational policies and everyday managerial practices. The following recommendations focus on strengthening ethical leadership and accountability, developing professional integrity and ethical competence, improving ethical climate and organisational justice, and integrating ethical management with healthcare quality.

5.1 Establish Strong Ethical Leadership and Accountability

Hospital management should establish clear expectations for ethical leadership at every managerial level. Senior managers, department heads, nursing leaders, and supervisors should demonstrate fairness, honesty,

accountability, transparency, and respect when making decisions and communicating with healthcare professionals. Brown et al. (2005) explained that ethical leadership involves demonstrating appropriate behaviour while actively promoting ethical conduct through communication, reinforcement, and decision making. This indicates that hospitals should move beyond written ethical policies by ensuring that leaders demonstrate ethical values through everyday managerial practices. Kalshoven et al. (2011) identified fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, and role clarification as important dimensions of ethical leadership. These characteristics can provide a useful foundation for leadership development within healthcare organisations. Yukl et al. (2013) further developed an ethical leadership questionnaire that emphasises integrity, communication of ethical values, fairness, and concern for others. Hospitals should therefore incorporate ethical behaviour into leadership selection, development, evaluation, and promotion. Managers should also provide clear explanations for important decisions and create opportunities for employees to express legitimate concerns. Consistent ethical leadership can strengthen employee confidence in management while ensuring that organisational values are translated into responsible managerial behaviour.

Accountability mechanisms should complement leadership development to ensure that ethical expectations are maintained consistently throughout the organisation. Hospital managers should be evaluated not only according to administrative and operational performance but also according to how they treat employees, manage conflicts, respond to ethical concerns, and maintain professional standards. Makaroff et al. (2014) demonstrated that ethical nursing leadership requires responsiveness to practitioners and sensitivity to organisational conditions. Leadership evaluation should consequently include evidence concerning communication, fairness, employee participation, and support for professional judgement. Yıldırım and Dinç (2019) also emphasised the importance of ethical sensitivity within nursing practice, demonstrating the continuing need to strengthen ethical awareness in healthcare environments. Ethical leadership can further influence organisational outcomes by shaping employee perceptions of fairness. Bayer and Şahin (2020) found that perceived ethical leadership was positively associated with organisational justice among hospital nurses. Regular leadership assessment, employee feedback, ethical case discussions, and management development programmes can therefore help hospitals identify weaknesses before they develop into serious organisational concerns. Combining leadership development with clear accountability allows ethical behaviour to become a measurable and visible component of effective hospital management.

5.2 Strengthen Professional Integrity and Ethical Competence

Continuous professional development should be used to strengthen the ability of healthcare professionals to recognise and manage ethical challenges. Knowledge of professional codes remains important, but healthcare employees also require practical ethical reasoning skills to manage situations involving competing responsibilities, patient interests, organisational requirements, and limited resources. Numminen et al. (2010) demonstrated the importance of ethical codes within nursing practice, while Lechasseur et al. (2018) identified ethical sensitivity, knowledge, reflection, decision making, behaviour, and action as important components of ethical competence. Hospitals should therefore incorporate ethical case analysis, reflective discussion, communication skills, and professional decision making into continuing development programmes. Rather than presenting ethics only as a set of rules, training should enable healthcare professionals to examine realistic situations and consider the consequences of different decisions. Professional values should also be reinforced throughout employment because ethical development continues beyond formal education. Poorchangizi et al. (2019) demonstrated the importance of professional values among both nurses and nursing students. Continuous ethical development can consequently strengthen professional integrity by helping healthcare employees connect professional principles with the complex situations encountered in actual hospital practice.

Moral courage should receive particular attention because professionals may recognise an appropriate action but hesitate to act when they anticipate disagreement or organisational consequences. Gallagher (2010) identified moral courage as an important virtue within nursing practice, while Numminen et al. (2019) demonstrated its relevance as a measurable component of professional nursing behaviour. Hospitals should therefore create safe and clearly understood procedures through which healthcare professionals can raise ethical concerns and obtain appropriate guidance. Management responses should demonstrate respect for legitimate professional judgement and avoid creating an environment where employees remain silent because they fear negative consequences. Zafarnia et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of ethical considerations and professional responsibility within healthcare decision making, reinforcing the need for organisational support when difficult situations arise.

Zydzianaite and Suominen (2014) similarly connected leadership and professional responsibility with ethical decision making in nursing contexts. Appropriate ethics consultation, professional discussion, and managerial support can help employees translate ethical knowledge into action. Strengthening moral courage together with ethical competence can therefore reduce the gap between recognising an ethical problem and responding to it responsibly.

5.3 Create a Supportive Ethical Climate and Strengthen Organisational Justice

Hospitals should actively develop an ethical climate in which healthcare professionals feel supported when discussing difficult professional and patient related concerns. Ethical climate is influenced by relationships among healthcare employees, managers, physicians, patients, and the wider organisation. Olson (1998) demonstrated these relationships through the Hospital Ethical Climate Survey, illustrating that ethical practice is influenced by the organisational environment rather than individual values alone. Management should consequently provide regular opportunities for interdisciplinary communication and ethical discussion. Pauly et al. (2009) found that more positive perceptions of ethical climate were associated with lower moral distress among nurses. Similar evidence was reported by Bayat et al. (2019), who identified a negative relationship between ethical climate and moral distress among nurses across six hospitals. Jeon et al. (2019) also examined ethical climate and moral distress among neonatal intensive care nurses, further demonstrating the relevance of ethical working conditions in specialised hospital environments. Hospitals should therefore monitor ethical climate and identify communication, leadership, or professional relationship problems that may prevent healthcare professionals from acting according to appropriate ethical standards.

Fair and transparent management practices should be developed alongside a supportive ethical climate because organisational justice can influence employee confidence in hospital leadership. Workload distribution, scheduling, recognition, promotion, resource allocation, and professional opportunities should be managed through consistent procedures that employees can understand. Colquitt et al. (2001) demonstrated that organisational justice consists of multiple dimensions of fairness associated with important employee attitudes and behaviours. Hospital managers should therefore communicate the reasoning behind significant decisions and provide employees with reasonable opportunities to raise concerns when those decisions affect their professional responsibilities. Bayer and Şahin (2020) found that perceived ethical leadership was positively associated with organisational justice among hospital nurses and that organisational justice was negatively related to turnover intention. Asgari et al. (2019) also demonstrated relationships among moral distress, ethical climate, and job satisfaction among critical care nurses. These findings reinforce the importance of creating organisational environments characterised by fairness, communication, and ethical support. Transparent management practices can strengthen trust while reducing perceptions that organisational decisions are inconsistent or unfair.

5.4 Integrate Ethical Management with Healthcare Quality Improvement

Ethical considerations should become an integral component of hospital quality improvement rather than being managed separately from clinical and organisational performance. Leadership decisions influence staffing, communication, teamwork, professional development, resource allocation, and accountability, all of which can affect the conditions under which healthcare services are delivered. Wong and Cummings (2007) demonstrated relationships between nursing leadership and patient outcomes, while Wong et al. (2013) provided further evidence that positive relational leadership practices are associated with favourable patient outcomes. Hospital quality programmes should therefore evaluate leadership practices alongside traditional clinical and operational indicators. Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2018) further demonstrated that ethical leadership can contribute to professional development and healthcare related outcomes. Ethical management should consequently be incorporated into quality meetings, leadership evaluations, professional development, and service improvement programmes. Managers should consider whether organisational decisions support professional responsibilities and whether employees have sufficient opportunities to communicate concerns that could affect patient care. Integrating ethical management with quality improvement can strengthen accountability while ensuring that improvements in hospital performance remain consistent with professional and patient centred values.

Reducing moral distress should also become part of organisational quality and workforce management because repeated ethical difficulties may affect professional practice and employee attitudes. Hospitals should identify

recurring situations that prevent healthcare professionals from acting according to their ethical judgement and determine whether organisational policies, resource limitations, communication problems, or leadership practices contribute to these experiences. Epstein et al. (2019) demonstrated the importance of systematically assessing moral distress among healthcare professionals, while Bayat et al. (2019) showed that a more positive ethical climate was associated with lower moral distress among hospital nurses. Zydziunaite and Suominen (2014) emphasised the connection between professional responsibility, leadership, and ethical decision making, suggesting that organisational support is essential for maintaining ethical practice. Zarei et al. (2016) also demonstrated the importance of patient perceptions and service quality within hospital environments, reinforcing the need to connect management practices with healthcare outcomes. Hospitals should consequently combine ethical leadership, employee support, professional integrity, organisational justice, and quality improvement within an integrated management approach. Such coordination can strengthen professional responsibility, employee trust, organisational effectiveness, and the quality of healthcare services.

6. Conclusion

Ethical leadership and professional integrity represent essential foundations for effective hospital management because healthcare organisations operate within environments where managerial decisions can directly influence employees, professional responsibilities, patient care, and organisational performance. The analysis demonstrates that ethical hospital management extends beyond compliance with professional codes and organisational policies. It requires leaders to demonstrate fairness, honesty, accountability, transparency, and consistency through their daily decisions and relationships with healthcare professionals. At the same time, professional integrity depends on the ability of healthcare employees to apply ethical knowledge, professional values, moral courage, and responsible judgement when dealing with complex situations. Hospitals should therefore recognise ethical leadership and professional integrity as interconnected organisational responsibilities rather than separate concerns associated only with individual behaviour.

A supportive ethical climate and strong organisational justice are equally important for creating working conditions that encourage responsible professional practice. Healthcare professionals are more likely to communicate ethical concerns and maintain professional standards when they perceive leadership practices and organisational decisions as fair, transparent, and supportive. Conversely, weak ethical environments, inconsistent managerial practices, and organisational barriers may contribute to moral distress and negatively influence employee attitudes and professional experiences. The article therefore emphasises the importance of strengthening communication, ethical competence, managerial accountability, organisational fairness, and opportunities for healthcare professionals to participate appropriately in ethical decision making. These elements can strengthen trust between employees and management while creating an organisational environment that supports professional judgement and responsible healthcare practice.

Moving forward, hospitals should integrate ethical considerations into leadership development, professional training, employee support, organisational decision making, and healthcare quality improvement. Clear ethical leadership expectations, continuous professional development, supportive mechanisms for raising ethical concerns, transparent management practices, and stronger organisational justice can provide practical foundations for improving ethical hospital management. Ethical management should also be connected with healthcare quality because leadership behaviour and organisational conditions influence the environment in which healthcare professionals perform their responsibilities. Ultimately, strengthening hospital management through ethical leadership and professional integrity requires a coordinated approach that places ethical responsibility at the centre of managerial and professional practice. Such an approach can contribute to stronger professional responsibility, employee trust, organisational effectiveness, responsible decision making, and sustained quality in healthcare service delivery.

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