

PRACTICAL ETHICS

Christopher Dubble, MSW



IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS IN ETHICS

- *Ethics*
- *Morality*
- *Laws and Regulations*
- *Professional Ethics*



IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS IN ETHICS

- *Ethics*
- *Morality*
- *Laws and Regulations*
- *Professional Ethics*



IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS IN ETHICS

- *Ethical problems*
- *Ethical dilemmas*
- *Ethical breaches.*



ETHICAL PRINCIPLES – BIO-MEDICAL

- **Nonmaleficence**
 - Obligation to not cause harm

- **Beneficence**
 - Obligation to do good and remove harm

- **Autonomy**
 - Obligation to respect an individual's right to decide, act and experience the consequences of their actions



ETHICAL PRINCIPLES – BIO-MEDICAL

- **Justice**

- Obligation to provide equal treatment for all individuals, act in a fair, equitable and just manner and avoid discrimination in judgment and actions

- **Veracity**

- Obligation to be accurate and truthful

- **Fidelity**

- Obligation to serve the well-being and best interests of an individual without divided loyalties



FIVE COMMON ETHICAL AREAS IN HUMAN SERVICES

1. Autonomy (Individual choices) versus beneficence (Risk reduction)
2. Informed consent
3. Individual safety versus community safety
4. Fidelity versus justice
5. Disaster planning



ETHICAL SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

- When confronting an ethical dilemma, principles are ranked in order of importance based on the elements of the situation in order to arrive at the best ethical decision.
- The following components of a situation should be considered when ranking the principles.
 - Risk indications
 - Preferences of the individual
 - Quality of life
 - Contextual factors

Adapted from the SOURCE: Mueller, Paul S., Hook, C. Christopher, and Fleming, Kevin C. (2004). Ethical Issues in Geriatrics: A Guide for Clinicians. Mayo Clinic Proceedings. 79:554-562.



RISK INDICATIONS

- What is the issue causing the risk?
- What is the time nature of the issue (i.e. short-term, long-term, emergent)?
- What is the probability that the decision will successfully mitigate risk?
- What is the probability of the individual being at greater risk from the decision?
- What is the risk to others, e.g. neighbors, from the situation?



PREFERENCES OF THE INDIVIDUAL

- Does the individual have decision-making capacity?
- If not, is the appropriate surrogate being utilized?
- What are the individual's stated preferences?
- Does the individual and/or surrogate have sufficient information to make an informed decision?
- What is the history of the individual's preferences related to the issue?



QUALITY OF LIFE

- What is the individual's definition of quality of life?
- What is the probability that the individual can meet their definition of quality of life with the decision?
- What is the probability that the individual can meet their definition of quality of life without the decision?
- What physical, mental and social deficits will the individual experience as a result of the decision?
- What bias exists by professionals regarding whether the individual's current and potential future condition are desirable?



CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

- What are the family issues weighing on the decision?
- Are there financial and economic factors?
- What are the religious and cultural factors associated with the situation?
- Are there allocation or resource issues?
- How do applicable laws and regulations affect the decision?
- What conflicts of interest exist for the professionals involved in the decision making?



ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING PITFALLS

- The #1 ethical decision-making pitfall is making an ethical decision alone. ***The most dangerous and deadly ethical decisions are made alone.***
- When addressing an ethical dilemma, agencies should:
 - Give equal consideration to all stake-holders
 - Not rush to judgement
 - Have an accessible ethics committee
 - Not allow authoritarian voices in the process
 - Avoid trying “to fix” problems
 - Be as transparent about the process as possible without violating confidentiality



CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONALS WHO ENGAGE IN POTENTIALLY UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

- Rationalize actions that are often self-serving
- Have no concept or a distorted view of professional boundaries
- Suffer from burnout or other emotional impairment
- “Slip” by losing sight of a goal or becoming distracted
- Gossip

Source: Koocher, G. & Keith-Spiegel, P. (2009). What should I do?: Ethical risks, making decisions and taking action.



CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONALS WHO ENGAGE IN POTENTIALLY UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

- Ignorant or misinformed with regard to the ethical standards of their profession
- Practice outside their realm of competence and expertise
- Show insensitivity to the needs of the individuals with whom they work or to situational dynamics
- Exploit individuals by putting their own needs first
- Behave irresponsibly
- Seek vengeance against perceived harms



HOW TO MAINTAIN OUR ETHICS

- Establish minimum safety standards
- Use risk assessment tools
- Understand stages of change
- Record with quality documentation
- Practice cultural awareness and inquisitiveness
- Conduct self-examination of morals and ethical values
- Engage in regular supervision
- Establish and/or consult an ethics committee



CONTACT

Christopher Dubble, MSW

Director of Training

Temple University Harrisburg

dubble@temple.edu

