



**St. Elizabeth's Ethics
Committee**

Ethics - Definitions

Personal Ethics: an individual's standards of conduct and values, often based in religion and culture.

Professional Ethics: Standards of conduct and values defined by a profession for its members.

Bioethics: Ethical questions surrounding life and death; often involve quality of life and use of technology. *The St. Elizabeth Ethics Committee is a bioethics committee.*

Ethical dilemma or conflict: A situation in which an individual must choose between two alternatives when neither is desirable.

Functions of the Ethics Committee

- Advise and serve as a resource to St. Elizabeth associates, administration, and medical staff
- Clarify complex ethical issues that arise in the care of our patients
- Assist in the development of educational programs related to bioethics



Ethics Consultations

- Usually called when there is confusion and/or disagreement about how to proceed in a difficult clinical situation.
- Most commonly, these conflicts arise over end-of-life care and mother/baby complications.



Factors Involved in Ethics Consultations

- Legislation and regulatory guidelines: Brain death determines death. Death used to be defined as cessation of breathing and heart function. How defined affects harvesting of organs.
- Science and technology: Life sustaining equipment can prolong dying process.
- Societal influences: Rights of the individual now more important, “say” in own care now viewed as a right.



How Ethics Committees Help

An Ethics Committee consult includes:

- Listening to patients, families, physicians, and clinical associates
- Identifying the conflicting bioethical issues
- Supporting all through the process to resolve complicated, stressful patient care situations

Hospital Ethics Committees do not make decisions. This is a common misconception about their role.

Final decisions are made by the patient, family and the health care team.

Our Faith-Based Heritage

St. Elizabeth Healthcare follows the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops'



Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services.

A copy of these directives can be found:

- On your unit/department Bulletin board
- On the website: nccbuscc.org/bishops/directives.htm
- With the manager in the area where you volunteer

Ethical and Religious Directives

“The purpose of these *Ethical and Religious Directives* then is twofold:

- First, to reaffirm the ethical standards of behavior in health care that flow from the Church’s teaching about the dignity of the human person;
- Second, to provide authoritative guidance on certain moral issues that face Catholic health care today.”

From the preamble to the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, 5th Edition, 2009.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Six Principles of Ethical Decision-Making

Classical ethics principles help guide all discussion of ethical conflicts.

Six major ethical principles include:

1. **Beneficence** ~ do good
2. **Nonmaleficence** ~ do not harm
3. **Autonomy** ~ the right of the individual to make own decisions
4. **Justice** ~ fairness to all
5. **Fidelity** ~ faithful to commitments
6. **Veracity** ~ telling the truth

Ethical Decision-Making and Potential Conflicts

Beneficence – May be a conflict when caregivers and patient differ about what is “good”

Nonmaleficence – Treatment may initially cause harm, although outcome is potentially good, such as with treatment for cancer. Conflict happens when there is disagreement about when treatment is overly burdensome for the patient compared to the potential benefit.

Autonomy – Caregivers must respect patient’s decision even if the decision is in direct conflict with the health care provider’s opinion



Ethical Decision-Making and Potential Conflicts



Justice – One type of justice is distributive justice, deals with the use of limited resources; uses the approach of the most benefit for the most people

Fidelity – Faithfulness to commitments; multiple demands on caregiver's time can lead to conflict. This principle underlies the responsibility to not abandon patients.

Veracity – We are obliged to tell the patient the truth. Example of conflict is when family does not want patient to know the diagnosis

When to Call Our Ethics Committee

Any patient, family member, physician or associate can contact the Ethics Committee:



- to ask questions or seek consultation on ethical and/or moral questions that arise.
- to have a discussion about ethical and/or moral issues or concerns.
- to seek help to deal with a conflict with patient/family issues regarding care or treatment decisions.

How to Contact the Ethics Committee

Any of the following methods can be utilized to access the Ethics Committee:

- Contact the nursing supervisor on duty
~this is the best method
- Contact the hospital chaplain on duty
- Contact any Ethics Committee member



Ethics Committee Review

- 1. The St. Elizabeth Ethics Committee is concerned with:**
 - A. Professional ethics
 - B. Personal ethics
 - C. Bioethics

- 2. Ethics committees make decisions for the patient, family and healthcare team.**
 - A. True
 - B. False

Ethics Committee Review

3. **The St. Elizabeth Ethics Committee is guided by the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*.**
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. **The *Ethical and Religious Directives* flow from the Church's teaching about the dignity of the human person.**
 - A. True
 - B. False

Ethics Committee Review

- 5. The ethical principle of beneficence means:**
- A. Do good
 - B. Do no harm
 - C. Individuals have a right to make their own decisions
 - D. Being faithful to commitments
 - E. Telling the truth

Ethics Committee Review

- 6. The ethical principle of autonomy means:**
- A. Do good
 - B. Do no harm
 - C. Individuals have a right to make their own decisions
 - D. Being faithful to commitments
 - E. Telling the truth

Ethics Committee Review

7. The ethical principle of nonmaleficence means:

- A. Do good
- B. Do no harm
- C. Individuals have a right to make their own decisions
- D. Being faithful to commitments
- E. Telling the truth

Ethics Committee Review

- 8. The best way to contact the Ethics Committee is to contact the Nursing Supervisor on duty.**
 - A. True
 - B. False

- 9. An Ethics consult can only be requested by the physician.**
 - A. True
 - B. False

Ethics Committee Review

- 10. The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services can be located:**
- A. Unit/department bulletin board
 - B. Website –
nccbuscc.org/bishops/directives.htm
 - C. Your manager
 - D. Any of the above