

BIOETHICAL DILEMMAS

What is an ethical dilemma?

- Dilemmas resulting from questions about truth telling, acknowledging uncertainty, paternalism, privacy, and fidelity are examples of issues that may be resolved between as few as two people
- An ethical dilemma is any situation in which guiding moral principles cannot determine which course of action is right or wrong.

Principles of Ethical Decision Making



Question!

- Do we have to respect autonomy if the patient is not competent? Not capable to make choices? Not autonomous?
- The answer is: No

To be truly autonomous, a patient must:

- Understand the situation, the option and the likely outcomes (consequences) of each option
- Be able to reflect on his/her values, goals and obligations related to the choice
- Be able to act on or communicate his/her choice

Patients are not considered to autonomous if they:

- Have cognitive deficits
- Are too young to understand & reason adequately
- Are psychotic
- Are not free to choose or to act (coerced)
- Impaired due to addiction
- Have been misinformed
- Does not grasp reality of the situation

Bioethical dilemmas

- Are situations that pose a choice between perplexing alternatives in the delivery of health care because of the lack of a clear sense of right or wrong.
- Concepts of life & death are central to nursing's body of knowledge, but a discussion of these concepts is incomplete unless the threats of conflict also are explored.

Bioethical dilemmas

- As a nursing student, do not assume that conflict is rare or that it is to be dealt with primarily by other professionals on the health care team.
- Conflict around some concepts such as life, birth, death, & dying should be addressed
- Also, conflict do not come up day after day in the practice of professional nursing

Ethical Dilemmas & Morals

- Ethical dilemmas arise when moral issues raise questions that cannot be answered with a simple, clearly defined rule, fact or authoritative view.
- The best choice about two right actions is not always self-evident
- None of the available options feels right.
- Both choices feel wrong

Example

- For a daughter trying to decide whether to withdraw life support from her 88 years old mother, it may feel wrong not to try to save her mother's life, but allowing her mother to suffer in useless medical condition probably will also feel wrong.
- On the other, for a healthcare professional considering this same case, there may be no real dilemma
- The healthcare professional may see clearly that the right choice is to withhold or withdraw life support

Moral dilemmas occur when:

- ✓ there is an evidence that an act is morally right &
- ✓ there some evidence indicates the act is morally wrong;
- ✓ yet the evidence on both sides is inconclusive (not definite); or you believe that on moral grounds, you cannot commit an act

Moral dilemma

- People judge wrong choices according to 3 criteria:
 1. Violation of law
 2. Departure from truth
 3. Deviation from moral integrity

Debate

- Abortion is legal, but many people believe it is not ethical.
- Does the legality of abortion affect whether it presents an ethical dilemma?

Institutional ethics committees

- Common within health care agencies

The purpose of the committee is to:

- provide ethics education,
- aid in ethical policy development,
- serve as a consultative body when resolution of an ethical dilemma cannot be reached otherwise.

Patient and Family Disagreement

- Do they understand the treatment proposed?
- Do they understand the risks and benefits?
- Do they understand the consequences of refusing a treatment?
- Are there religious or cultural reasons for refusal?
- Are there financial concerns?



Resources

- Second opinion
- Patient who has had a similar treatment
- Clergy رجال الدين
- Social worker
- Psychologist

Case Study

Ellen is a 32 old female who has had Ulcerative Colitis for 20 years. Recently married. No children. She is an attorney who typically works 50-60 hours per week.

She had 4 hospitalizations in the last 18 months.

Treatments have included:

1. Mesalamine
2. Azathioprine
3. Infliximab for 6 years
4. 4 course of prednisone in the last 2 years

Her gastroenterologist recommends a colectomy.

Her husband wants her to have the surgery right away, but Ellen refuses.



Possible Barriers?

For Ellen:

- Concern over fertility
- Body image
- Intimacy
- Loss of income during recovery
- Fear of unknown



Possible Barriers?

For her husband:

- Concern about cancer
- Difficulty seeing her sick
- Fear of her dying without surgery
- Caregiver fatigue
- Wanting a family



Conclusion

- Know yourself and your values
- Protect your patient by intervening if you identify an ethical question
- Know your facility policy for access to the ethics committee
- Know your responsibilities with regard to informed consent
- Respect your patient

Ethical dilemmas in healthcare settings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D-K2twZwr8>

ethical dilemma in healthcare setting, being honest with patients

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmAnCcadvBs>

END