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PHARMACY ETHICS

Introduction

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- Over the past few decades pharmacy has undergone dramatic changes and evolved into a highly patient oriented profession.
- The changing role of the pharmacist, development of pharmaceutical care as a practice standard, and complex health and drug distribution systems make it almost impossible to avoid ethical issues.

- Like all professions, pharmacy imposes ethical standards and obligations on its practitioners.
- Although pharmacists practice in a variety of settings, such as community pharmacies, hospitals, ambulatory clinics, and home care, there are many problems that all pharmacists share.

- ⦿ E.g. any pharmacist may be asked by a physician, other health care provider, or patient to engage in actions that are **not consistent with the pharmacist's conscience.**
- ⦿ Pharmacists may be held accountable for their actions when their professional association has a code, such as **the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA).**

- Every pharmacist, whether aware of it or not, is constantly making ethical choices. Sometimes these choices are dramatic, life-and-death decisions, but often they are more subtle,

DEFINITION

- ◉ **Ethics** is the study of the rightness or wrongness of human conduct.
- ◉ In any situation involving two or more individuals, values may come into conflict and ethical issues may develop. This is especially true in the case of health care where pain and suffering are involved

- **Pharmacy ethics** is a branch of medical ethics that provides a framework for pharmacists to use in resolving questions about what ought to be done in pharmacy practice.

- Patient care involves applied ethics in that it consists of the practical application of moral standards to specific ends.
- Pharmaceutical care is dependent upon **human interactions**. These interactions include patients, family members, pharmaceutical care practitioners, other clinicians, support personnel, managers, and administrators

- These individuals are likely to have different values, beliefs, and preferences. Whenever two people with different value systems interact, there is the potential for an ethical problem to develop.
- ethical problems would be easier dealt with if they were not so often confused with clinical and legal issues.

- These three issues—
 - clinical,
 - legal, and
 - ethical—
- can be so closely associated that they appear to be the same problem.
- *clinical* problems should be identified and resolved first, followed by *legal* issues, and if an *ethical* problem remains, it can then be resolved effectively.

ETHICAL DECISIONS

- □ Not clear-cut, either/or, correct or incorrect (binary) decisions
- □ Require a balance between a professional code of ethics and personal morals
- □ Are not emotional reactions, but courses of conduct that have been weighed and measured carefully

ETHICAL THEORIES

- ⦿ two basic types of ethical theory
- ⦿ *consequentialism*, an ethical theory concerned only with the outcomes or consequences of actions, and
- ⦿ *nonconsequentialism*, an ethical theory based upon the actions themselves without particular regard to their consequences.

- To a consequentialist, an action becomes “right” or “wrong” in terms of the **benefit or harm** the patient—and all others concerned—might derive from a given action.
- Following this line of reasoning, lying to a patient would be permissible, even laudable, if it resulted in some benefit to the patient or others.

- The nonconsequentialist, on the other hand, looks at the action itself as either right or wrong, without regard to outcome.
- Following this line of reasoning, lying to a patient is wrong by definition, whether or not the lie might ultimately “benefit” all concerned parties.

ISSUES OF THE LAW

- Pharmacy law consists of rules, regulations, and actions that are promulgated by governments and are binding on its constituents.
- Law and ethics, while in most cases clearly demarcated, often overlap and sometimes appear contradictory.

EXAMPLE

- Should a pharmacist, based on her clinical judgment at the time of an emergency, provide a patient with a life-saving drug not authorized by a physician's prescription,
- when technically she is breaking the law, but is arguably acting ethically?

- ⦿ Being an active *moral agent* can conflict with the law and often does
- ⦿ The law prescribes codes of conduct that are usually reasonable, clear, and direct. Thus, we divide actions into two classes: *legal and illegal*.
- ⦿ Ethical analysis requires critical examination of actions and their consequences and are *not so easily differentiated* as appropriate and inappropriate.

PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ETHICS

- ◉ the code of ethics for a profession provide even more guidance for the practitioner.
- ◉ However, no code of ethics can contain all the necessary detail to address all issues that arise on a daily basis.
- ◉ Rather, it is to be seen as a somewhat sweeping statement on the overall ethical mandate of a profession.
- ◉ In this sense, it makes a public statement concerning a collective commitment to certain values, principles, and duties.

CODE OF ETHICS FOR PHARMACISTS (AMERICAN PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION)

- ◉ Pharmacists are health professionals who assist individuals in making the best use of medications.
- ◉ This Code, prepared and supported by pharmacists, is intended to state publicly the principles that form the fundamental basis of the roles and responsibilities of pharmacists.
- ◉ These principles, based on moral obligations and virtues, are established to guide pharmacists in relationships with patients, health professionals, and society.

- I. *A pharmacist respects the covenantal relationship between the patient and pharmacist*
- means that a pharmacist has moral obligations in response to the gift of trust received from society.
- In return for this gift, a pharmacist promises to help individuals achieve optimum benefit from their medications, to be committed to their welfare, and to maintain their trust.

- ◉ II. A pharmacist promotes the good of every patient in a caring, compassionate, and confidential manner
- ◉ A pharmacist places concern for the well being of the patient at the center of professional practice.
- ◉ In doing so, a pharmacist considers needs stated by the patient as well as those defined by health science. A pharmacist is dedicated to protecting the dignity of the patient. With a caring attitude and a compassionate spirit, a pharmacist focuses on serving the patient in a private and confidential manner.

- ◉ III. A pharmacist respects the autonomy and dignity of each patient
- ◉ A pharmacist promotes the right of self-determination and recognizes individual self-worth by encouraging patients to participate in decisions about their health.
- ◉ A pharmacist communicates with patients in terms that are understandable.
- ◉ In all cases, a pharmacist respects personal and cultural differences among patients.

- ◉ IV. A pharmacist acts with honesty and integrity in professional relationships
- ◉ A pharmacist has a duty to tell the truth and to act with conviction of conscience.
- ◉ A pharmacist avoids discriminatory practices, behavior or work conditions that impair professional judgment, and actions that compromise dedication to the best interests of patients.

- ◉ V. A pharmacist maintains professional competence
- ◉ A pharmacist has a duty to maintain knowledge and abilities as new medications, devices, and technologies become available and as health information advances.

- ◉ VI. A pharmacist respects the values and abilities of colleagues and other health professionals
- ◉ When appropriate, a pharmacist asks for the consultation of colleagues or other health professionals or refers the patient.
- ◉ A pharmacist acknowledges that colleagues and other health professionals may differ in the beliefs and values they apply to the care of the patient.

- ◉ VII. A pharmacist serves individual, community, and societal needs
- ◉ The primary obligation of a pharmacist is to individual patients.
- ◉ However, the obligations of a pharmacist may at times extend beyond the individual to the community and society.
- ◉ In these situations, the pharmacist recognizes the responsibilities that accompany these obligations and acts accordingly.

- ◉ VIII. A pharmacist seeks justice in the distribution of health resources
- ◉ When health resources are allocated, a pharmacist is fair and equitable, balancing the needs of patients and society.

COMMON ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Table 10-1 Common Ethical Dilemmas in Pharmaceutical Care Practice

Patient-practitioner interaction	Institutional context
Patient confidentiality and privacy issues	Allocation of resources and rationing
Conflicts of interest	Personal competency, colleague competency
Respect for patient autonomy	Protection of standards
Duty to warn	
Patient/practitioner conflicts in values	

- ⦿ Patient Confidentiality and Privacy Issues
- ⦿ **Example** It would be considered unethical to discuss or disclose personal health-related information about your patient with one of your friends or family members who is not a health care provider and who is not involved in the care of that patient.

⦿ Conflicts of Interest

- The patient is the focus of the practitioner's actions. Doing good for the patient may or may not benefit the practitioner.
- Beneficence on the part of a health care practitioner means that all the work, decisions, and actions taken are intended to benefit someone else.
- **Definition** Conflict of interest (for an individual): An individual has a conflict of interest when a personal, financial, or political interest exists that undermines his or her ability to meet or fulfill primary professional, ethical, or legal obligations

- Example There is a potential for a conflict of interest if the practitioner is in a position to personally benefit from the selection and use of a particular drug product unless that product is unique and no acceptable alternatives exist.
- In either case, the practitioner needs to disclose his/her personal interest in that product to the patient.

○ Patient Autonomy

- **Example** It would be considered a breach of your patient's autonomy to provide misleading drug information or withhold information in order to *convince* your patient to use the pharmacotherapy you are recommending.
- Practitioners need to assist and allow patients to be the final decision maker when it comes to their own health.

⦿ Duty to Warn

- Practitioners who treat patients with medications have a duty to warn patients of the known risks associated with drug therapies.
- **Example** It would be considered a failure of your duty to warn not to inform your patient of the potential harmful effects that drinking alcohol can have while taking a course of metronidazole to treat an infection.

○ Conflicts in Value Systems

- **Example** Practitioners who hold personal beliefs that all forms of contraception are wrong have the obligation to see that patients requiring contraceptive pharmacotherapy have access to those products and associated drug information.

○ Allocation of Resources

- Example Practitioners can find themselves in an ethical dilemma if management requires that they provide care for too many patients without adequate resources.

○ Competency

- **Example** If a practitioner does not maintain an acceptable level of knowledge about the safety and efficacy of the drug products he/she recommends to patients, it would be considered a case of clinical and ethical incompetency.

IDENTIFYING ETHICAL PROBLEMS

- not always an easy task.
- prerequisites to the provision of patient care
 - Socio-cultural understanding, along with that of
 - ethical understanding and
 - clinical knowledge
- Following is a number of guidelines that take the form of questions which should routinely be asked whenever differences between the practitioner and patient occur and must be resolved. These inquiries include the following:

- 1. Is this a situation in which I am allowing my personal values (political views, religious beliefs, social norms) to interfere with my professional responsibilities?
- 2. Is this a situation that involves a clinical problem and therefore requires me to use my expertise and clinical judgment?
- 3. Is this a situation that involves a legal decision and therefore following the law is the solution?
- 4. Finally, is this an ethical problem that requires a systematic problem-solving process to address it successfully