

## CHAPTER 3

UNIT 1 SAFE, EFFECTIVE CARE ENVIRONMENT  
SECTION: MANAGEMENT OF CARE

CHAPTER 3 *Ethical Responsibilities*

Ethics is the study of conduct and character, and a code of ethics is a guide for the expectations and standards of a profession.

Ethical theories examine principles, ideas, systems, and philosophies that affect judgments about what is right and wrong, and good and bad. Common ethical theories are utilitarianism, deontology, consensus in bioethics, and ethics of care.

Ethical principles for individuals, groups of individuals, and societies are standards of what is right or wrong with regard to important social values and norms.

Values are personal beliefs about ideas that determine standards that shape behavior.

Morals are personal values and beliefs about behavior and decision-making.

## ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING IN NURSING

Bioethics refers to the application of ethics to health and life. It addresses dilemmas such as stem cell research, organ transplantation, gender reassignment, and reproductive technologies (in vitro fertilization, surrogate parenting)

### BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS

- **Advocacy:** support of clients' health, wellness, safety, and personal rights, including privacy.
- **Responsibility:** willingness to respect obligations and follow through on promises.
- **Accountability:** ability to answer for one's own actions.
- **Confidentiality:** protection of privacy without diminishing access to high-quality care.

### ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CLIENT CARE

- **Autonomy:** the right to make one's own personal decisions, even when those decisions might not be in that person's own best interest.
- **Beneficence:** action that promotes good for others, without any self-interest.
- **Fidelity:** fulfillment of promises.
- **Justice:** fairness in care delivery and use of resources.
- **Nonmaleficence:** a commitment to do no harm. 
- **Veracity:** a commitment to tell the truth.

### ETHICAL DILEMMAS

- Ethical dilemmas are problems that involve more than one choice and stem from differences in the values and beliefs of the decision makers. These are common in health care, and nurses must apply ethical theory and decision-making to ethical problems.
- A problem is an ethical dilemma when:
  - A review of scientific data is not enough to solve it.
  - It involves a conflict between two moral imperatives.
  - The answer will have a profound effect on the situation and the client.

## ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

Ethical decision-making is a process that requires striking a balance between science and morality.

### **When making an ethical decision:**

- Identify whether the issue is indeed an ethical dilemma.
- Gather as much relevant information as possible about the dilemma.
- Reflect on your own values as they relate to the dilemma.
- State the ethical dilemma, including all surrounding issues and the individuals it involves.
- List and analyze all possible options for resolving the dilemma, and review the implications of each option.
- Select the option that is in concert with the ethical principle that applies to this situation, the decision maker's values and beliefs, and the profession's values for client care. Justify selecting that one option in light of the relevant variables.
- Apply this decision to the dilemma, and evaluate the outcomes.

**Ethics committees** generally address unusual or complex ethical issues.

**Examples of ethical guidelines** for nurses are the American Nurses Association's *Code of Ethics for Nurses With Interpretive Statements* (2015) and the International Council of Nurses' *The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses* (2012).

## 3.1 Nursing's roles in ethical decision-making

An agent for clients facing an ethical decision. Examples:

- Caring for an adolescent client who has to decide whether to undergo an abortion even though her parents believe it is wrong
- Discussing options with a parent who has to decide whether to consent to a blood transfusion for a child when his religion prohibits such treatment

A decision maker for health care delivery. Examples:

- Assigning staff nurses a higher client load than previously because administration has reduced the number of nurses per shift
- Witnessing a surgeon discussing only surgical options with a client without mentioning more conservative measures

## Application Exercises

1. A nurse is caring for a client who decides not to have surgery despite significant blockages in his coronary arteries. The nurse understands that this client's choice is an example of which of the following ethical principles?  
 A. Fidelity  
 B. Autonomy  
 C. Justice  
 D. Nonmaleficence
2. A nurse offers pain medication to a client who is postoperative prior to ambulation. The nurse understands that this aspect of care delivery is an example of which of the following ethical principles?  
 A. Fidelity  
 B. Autonomy  
 C. Justice  
 D. Beneficence
3. A nurse is instructing a group of nursing students about the responsibilities organ donation and procurement involve. When the nurse explains that all clients waiting for a kidney transplant have to meet the same qualifications, the students should understand that this aspect of care delivery is an example of which of the following ethical principles?  
 A. Fidelity  
 B. Autonomy  
 C. Justice  
 D. Nonmaleficence
4. A nurse questions a medication prescription as too extreme in light of the client's advanced age and unstable status. The nurse understands that this action is an example of which of the following ethical principles?  
 A. Fidelity  
 B. Autonomy  
 C. Justice  
 D. Nonmaleficence
5. A nurse is instructing a group of nursing students about how to know and what to expect when ethical dilemmas arise. Which of the following situations should the students identify as an ethical dilemma?  
 A. A nurse on a medical-surgical unit demonstrates signs of chemical impairment.  
 B. A nurse overhears another nurse telling an older adult client that if he doesn't stay in bed, she will have to apply restraints.  
 C. A family has conflicting feelings about the initiation of enteral tube feedings for their father, who is terminally ill.  
 D. A client who is terminally ill hesitates to name her spouse on her durable power of attorney form.

### PRACTICE Active Learning Scenario

A nurse is teaching a group of nursing students about the process of resolving ethical dilemmas. Use the ATI Active Learning Template: Basic Concept to complete this item.

**UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES:** Define the ethical decision-making process.

**NURSING INTERVENTIONS:** List the steps of making an ethical decision.

ciara Russell  
Terry Simpson  
katee Clare  
Whitney Williams

