

## 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

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**

Application Exercises

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 o r e s c r i p t i o n as 100 e x t r e m e 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

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

FUNDAMENTALS FOR NURSING