

Third stage\2nd course
Pharmacy Ethics



**ETHICAL
DECISION
MAKING**

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Ethical decision-making in medical practice

It is a critical skill for healthcare professionals, and it refers to the process of making choices that align with ethical principles, professional standards, and legal requirements while ensuring the best outcomes for patients.



- The decisions made by medical practitioners have profound consequences for the health, well-being, and dignity of patients.
- More over decisions by pharmacists (and other healthcare professionals) are only part of an approach to solving problems. Some questions may not be in contention, for example, the dose and strength of medicine provided you can find in an authoritative reference source, the wishes of the patient provided they are in front of you and able to respond.

Steps for Ethical Decision-Making in Medical Practice

1. Identify the Ethical Dilemma:

1. Recognize when a situation presents conflicting moral principles.
2. Understand the impact of the decision on the patient and others involved.



Example: A physician must decide whether to respect a patient's decision to refuse life-saving treatment, even though the physician believes the treatment is necessary.

2. Gather Relevant Information:

1. Collect all pertinent information about the patient's condition, preferences, and cultural considerations.
2. Consult with other healthcare professionals or ethical boards if necessary.

Example: Before making a decision about surgery, the doctor should consider the patient's medical history, current condition, and personal wishes.

3. Evaluate the Alternatives:

1. Identify the possible courses of action and their consequences for the patient.
2. Assess the ethical implications of each option in terms of the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice.



Example: A doctor could either offer aggressive chemotherapy or provide palliative care. Each choice comes with different impacts on the patient's quality of life.

4. Make a Decision:

1. Choose the action that best aligns with ethical principles.
2. Be clear about why you're making the decision and how it balances the moral principles involved.



5. Communicate the Decision:

1. Communicate the decision to the patient or their family in a compassionate and clear manner.
2. Ensure that the patient understands the reasons behind the decision.

6. Reflect on the Outcome:

1. After the decision has been implemented, reflect on whether it achieved the intended ethical goals.
2. Consider how similar situations can be handled in the future.

Ethical Frameworks in Medical Practice



1.Utilitarianism:

- 1.This ethical theory focuses on the outcomes of decisions, aiming to maximize overall good or happiness.
- 2.In healthcare, utilitarianism may guide decisions in triage situations, where resources are limited, and the goal is to save the greatest number of lives.

Example: In a mass casualty event, physicians may prioritize treatment for patients with higher chances of survival.

DEONTOLOGY

2. Deontology:

- Deontological ethics is based on duty and rules, regardless of the outcomes.
- In medical ethics, deontological approaches emphasize the duty to respect patient rights, adhere to professional standards, and follow ethical guidelines.

Example: A doctor may choose to honor a patient's refusal of treatment, even if it means the patient's health could deteriorate, because the patient has the right to make decisions about their care.



3. Virtue Ethics:

- Virtue ethics emphasizes the character of the healthcare professional. It suggests that a good medical professional develops virtues such as compassion, wisdom, and honesty.
- Decisions are guided by what a virtuous professional would do in a given situation.

Example: A doctor might take the time to communicate compassionately with a patient facing a terminal diagnosis, considering not only the treatment plan but also the emotional well-being of the patient.

4. Care Ethics:

- Care ethics emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships and the context of care. It focuses on empathy, trust, and the specific needs of the individual.

Example: A doctor may consider the emotional needs of an elderly patient, making sure that they are not only physically cared for but also emotionally supported through their treatment.



Challenges in Ethical Decision-Making

- Making ethical decisions in medical practice is challenging but essential for **delivering high-quality, compassionate care**. By adhering to ethical principles, consulting relevant frameworks, and considering patient well-being, healthcare professionals can make decisions that are ethically sound and aligned with their professional responsibilities.



1. Cultural Sensitivity: Medical practitioners must be mindful of cultural differences when making decisions. Some cultural beliefs may affect how a patient approaches treatment options.

Example: A family might refuse a blood transfusion due to religious beliefs, even if the medical team believes it is necessary for the patient's survival. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for navigating the situation respectfully.

Cont.

2. Conflicts of Interest: Medical practitioners must avoid situations where their decisions may be influenced by personal or financial interests rather than the patient's well-being.

3. Informed Consent: Ensuring that patients fully understand the risks and benefits of a treatment option before making a decision is essential. This includes addressing language barriers, mental capacity, and literacy.



Case Study Example

Case: A 65-year-old woman diagnosed with terminal cancer is offered a clinical trial that could prolong her life for a few months. However, the treatment has severe side effects, and her quality of life may decrease significantly.

- **Ethical Dilemma:** The doctor must decide whether to respect the patient's autonomy to pursue the trial or recommend palliative care that would offer a more comfortable end-of-life experience.
- **Evaluation:** The doctor must balance the patient's desire for life extension (autonomy) with the potential suffering caused by side effects (non-maleficence).
- **Decision:** After discussing the options thoroughly with the patient and her family, the doctor may recommend palliative care while respecting the patient's desire for comfort over aggressive treatment.

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