Ethics and Professionalism

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Ethics Session Objectives

- Review the language of ethics
- Describe the relationship between ethics and professionalism
- Introduce ethical reasoning
- Discuss an organizational ethics decision-making process
- Describe the importance of ethics for both executives and organizations
- Identify ethics resources for today’s executives
The Language of Ethics and Professionalism

- **Ethics (applied)**
  The discipline that considers what “should” be done, what is the “right” thing to do when there is uncertainty or questions regarding principles or values.

- **Healthcare ethics**
  The area of ethics that deals with decisions or action relating to health care
The Language of Ethics and Professionalism

- Health care ethics includes:
  - Clinical ethics
  - Research ethics
  - Organizational/business ethics

- Health care ethics is different from:
  - Compliance
  - The law
The Language of Ethics and Professionalism

- Ethical conflicts – occur when there is uncertainty, question, or a conflict about what is right or wrong regarding competing ethical principles, personal values, or professional and organizational ethical standards of practice.
Ethical Conflicts for Today’s Healthcare Executives

- Conflicts of interest
- Clinical care policy
- Reimbursement
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Resource allocation
- Access to health care
- Etc., etc., etc…
Addressing Ethical Conflicts - Moral Reasoning

• Moral reasoning is the process and reasoning that a person applies in determining what is right or wrong or what one should or should not do regarding the conflict or question.

• Moral reasoning is the answer to the question, “why is an action right or wrong?”
Ethical Decision-Making: Balancing and Applying

- Common morality
- Personal values and beliefs
- Group specific ethics
Ethical Decision-Making: Balancing and Applying

• Common morality
  ➢ General moral rules or principles that are universal
  ➢ Despite being universal, not absolute
  ➢ Ethics debates frequently focus on, when is one justified to violate a moral principle, such as truth-telling or confidentiality or killing
Ethical Decision-Making: Balancing and Applying

- Common morality
- **Personal values and beliefs**
  - Religion or faith-based beliefs
  - Cultural values
  - Family values
Ethical Decision-Making: Balancing and Applying

- Common morality
- Personal values and beliefs
- **Group specific morality**
  - “Do your duty” – obligations related to one’s participation in a profession and organization
  - Also known as “Professional Ethics”
Group Specific Ethics – Professional Ethics

- Professional ethics addresses the conduct, obligations, and practices carried out by specific professions.
- Professional ethics affirms:
  - The nature of the profession
  - The aspirations of the profession
  - What society values and expects of the profession
Professional Ethics

• Professional ethics is reflected in:
  ▪ Professional ethics position papers
  ▪ Codes of Ethics
  ▪ Ethical standards of practice
  ▪ Position descriptions
Professional Codes of Ethics

- Sets out ideals, obligations, and responsibilities of profession
- Provides guidance on behavior and practices
- Enhances awareness by making expectations explicit
- Fosters quality and consistency
- Creates a regulatory effect
- Reflects and promotes consumer expectations
ACHE Code of Ethics

• Sets out ideals and responsibilities of the profession
• Clarifies responsibilities to:
  ➢ Profession
  ➢ Patients
  ➢ Organization
  ➢ Employees
  ➢ Community
"I'm making this decision on principle, just to see how it feels."
Executive Ethics
Decision-Making Process

- What is the ethical conflict?
- Who are the affected stakeholders and what are their values?
- What are the circumstances surrounding the ethical conflict?
- What are the moral concepts or principles relevant to the ethical conflict?
Executive Ethics
Decision-Making Process (continued)

• What are the different options for responding to the conflict?
• What option would you select and why?
• How would you share and implement the selected option?
• How are you assessing the decision or action to ensure it achieved the desired goal?
Application of Executive Ethics
Decision-Making Process

• Reactive activity – in response to an ethical conflict or question

• Proactive activity – to address recurring ethical conflicts or questions
Executive Ethics Resources

- ACHE resources – Code of Ethics, ethics policy statements, website ethics toolkit, ethics self-assessment etc.
- Local facility ethics program – ethics committee
- Academic ethics centers and ethicists
- Ethics literature
Executive Ethical Leadership

- Ethical visionary
- Fosters an organizational culture that reflects ethical practices
- Demonstrates the importance of ethics
- Ensures that mechanisms exist to address clinical and organizational ethical issues
- Identifies and uses a system-oriented ethical decision-making process
High Performing, Ethical Organizations do not just Happen

- High performing, ethical organizations have:
  - Integrated shared ethical culture: mission statement, clinical and organizational ethical practices, ethical leadership and staff
  - Effective ethics infrastructure to develop ethical standards of practice and to clarify uncertainty or conflicts regarding the ethical practices
Ethics Fosters Success: 
Ethics is *Not* Window Dressing

- Correlation between ethical culture and organizational performance and quality
  - Increases employee morale and decreases stress
  - Improves patient satisfaction
  - Fewer lawsuits
  - Enhances public relations
  - Meets Joint Commission ethics standards
  - Deceases the costs of ethical conflicts and improves quality
### Conscience Spending

In a telephone survey of 2,000 adults in December 2005,...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>72%</th>
<th>prefer to buy products and services from a company with ethical business practices and higher prices, rather than...</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>from a company with questionable business practices and lower prices, while...</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>did not know.</td>
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</tbody>
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*Source: LRN  The New York Times*
Ethics and Professionalism

Conclusion:

• An executive’s ethics is reflected in behavior and contributes to the organization’s culture
• Ethical decision-making is essential
• Ethics mechanisms should be supported and used
• ACHE and other resources are helpful ethics tools
• Ethical practice is a key driver to individual and organizational success