

PREFACE

EVOLUTION IS a progression of interrelated phenomena. Society is continuously evolving and as an institution of society, healthcare is evolving as well. Thoughtful men and women have studied this evolution and helped to develop rules of conduct for each new paradigm. Our sense of morality changes as well, and the old rules of moral behavior do not always apply. On a fundamental level, people need and want guidance and standards to help them “do the right thing.”

Nowhere is this evolution more evident than in the complex field of healthcare management. Healthcare as a microcosm of society reacts and responds to societal events. Continual advances in technology, changes in healthcare financing, increasing consumer needs and expectations, the proliferation of socioeconomically induced health problems, the ever expanding public scrutiny and litigation all contribute to the significant complexity of healthcare. As such, the decision-making process in healthcare management has become more complicated and it is especially difficult for healthcare executives to feel confident that they are making ethically responsible decisions.

Amid this turmoil of constant change, healthcare executives frequently find themselves in uncharted waters where the ethical “rules” may be unclear. “Real-life” ethical dilemmas are complex. Rarely is there a single ethical issue to resolve. More often, numerous intertwined issues with many stakeholders with diverse values interested in the outcome clamor for attention. Ambiguities abound; resolutions to ethical dilemmas do not come easily.

The cases presented here reflect the realities of healthcare management, the diversity of special interests, and the competing values and the moral conflicts that challenge the healthcare executive. Each case is followed by a description of the ethics issues inherent in the case which is then followed by a discussion of these interrelated issues. In some cases, a relevant essay completes the chapter.

The Paradise Hills Medical Center case in Chapter 1 focuses on medical errors, truth telling, and autonomy. It is followed by “Deciding Values,” an essay by Joan McIver Gibson, Ph.D.

The Qual Plus HMO case (Chapter 2) appears to focus on conflict of interest issues but in reality is exploring the issue of conflicting moral demands when an individual is asked to do something the person believes to be unethical or observes one in authority behaving in unethical ways. Essays on “Ethical Issues in Managed Care” by Richard H. Rubin, M.D., and on “Evaluating Healthcare Ethics Committees” by Rebecca A. Dobbs, Ph.D., complete the chapter.

The Rolling Meadows Community Hospital case (Chapter 3) explores the issues surrounding mentorship, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination and offers a discussion that highlights some of the ambiguities of “wrong doing.”

Chapter 4’s University Hospital case highlights some of the pitfalls of impairment and how it can compromise patient safety and graduate medical education. An essay on other ethical issues in graduate medical education by Clinton H. Dowd, M.D. completes this chapter.

The Hillside County Medical Center case by Glenn A. Fosdick, FACHE in Chapter 5 focuses on the ethical implications of workforce reductions. Hospitals in financial stress sometimes use the euphemism, “right sizing,” but to the employee being laid off and the ones left behind to pick up the slack, it can be a disaster. This case looks at the issues involved and the leadership required to make ethically sound decisions when a hospital is in financial crisis.

Chapter 6 provides legal perspectives on each of the preceding cases by attorney Walter P. Griffin, Esq. He also discusses the differences between “illegal and unethical” and “legal but unethical” behaviors. Chapter 7 discusses the ethics of managing people and the interpersonal conflicts that exist and the ethical dilemmas that may ensue within the healthcare delivery system.

The epilogue provides follow-up on each of these cases for those who wish to know if and how the ethical issues were resolved and what happened then.

These cases and the discussions emanating from them are intended to stimulate thoughtful analysis and reflection on the part of the reader to successfully navigate the quagmire of ambiguity that ethical dilemmas can present.