

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND
Ethics in Infection Prevention and
Control

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Goals

What is ethics?
How do we know it's ethics?
What's ethical about my work?



Ethics

...a roadmap for doing
the right thing.



What is ethics?

Ethics is about right and wrong and the reasons we give for our decisions and actions.

Ethics is an approach to decision making. It is about the criteria for deciding what is right and what is wrong, what is good and bad.

Ethics is a process for exploring and clarifying options.



Philip Hebert, *Doing Right*

Ethical Dilemma

Choices are difficult when

- The problem is complex
- There is disagreement about what is important
- There is more than one option
- Choosing one thing means another is impossible

Goal: to arrive at a solution that you can live with.



Examples

- Is torture ever justified?
- When might it be acceptable to tell a lie?
- What is our obligation toward animals?
- What is the best way to help people in need?
- Should I tell my friend her husband is cheating?



“Settled” Issues in Ethics

Examples

- Duty to care – should not abandon a person in need, even if you don’t agree with their choices
- Informed Consent – should not intervene without patient’s full understanding and agreement
- Reportable diseases – there are some infections that it is in the public interest to track



IPAC Ethics

System level

- Mandatory vaccination
- Antimicrobial stewardship

Point of care

- Isolation
- Hand washing
- Cohorting



How do we know it’s ethics?

- Triggers “moral radar”
- “Should” or “ought” questions
- Values conflicts
- Multiple defensible options
- Mutual exclusivity



What's ethical about my job?

- Calling in sick
- Hand washing
- Isolation
- Orders under the Public Health Act
- Harm reduction



Calling in Sick

What is most important? To you? To your patients? To colleagues?



Hand Washing

Washing on principle – balancing personal choice, efficiency, risk, and fairness



Isolation

Balancing individual freedoms with the advancement of good health outcomes



Public Health Orders

Balancing obligations to the individual and the community under the law



Harm Reduction

Minimizing risks to demonstrate respect and caring and keep the relationship open



Other Considerations

- Confidentiality
- Veracity
- Fidelity
- Time



How do we “do” ethics?

Ethics roadmap:

- Values
- Principles
- Obligations
- Outcomes
- Relationships



Conclusion

- Ethics is a road map for decision making
- Ethics is part of everyone’s job
- We can help!



For further information

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