

A Brief Look at Ethics

DEFINITIONS:

- Ethics - moral principles, morally right, a standard of conduct.
- Ethicist - a specialist in ethics.
- Dilemma - any situation requiring a choice between unpleasant alternatives.

Most ethicists say there are seven ETHICAL PRINCIPLES:

- Beneficence - doing good, caring.
- Non-maleficence - doing no harm.
- Justice - being fair.
- Autonomy - respecting the patient's right to make decisions.
- Loyalty (Fidelity) - keeping promises.
- Veracity - telling the truth.
- Confidentiality - keeping the patient's information private.

Some say that all ethical decisions are based on the economic, or money, interest of the provider and of society. In other words, what will the decision cost and is it worth it?

Here are ways you can PUT THESE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE:

- Respect the culture and customs of your patients.
- Be truthful in all communication.
- Do not speak badly of patients, coworkers or the Agency.
- Avoid exploitation of relationships for personal advantage.
- Do not discriminate.
- Assure confidentiality of patients - do not talk about them to others who do not have "the need to know."
- Assure autonomy of patients - let them participate in deciding their care and treatment.

THINK ABOUT THESE SAMPLES OF ETHICAL DILEMMAS:

- ? Your elderly patient, who is disoriented, needs a blood transfusion. Her son has medical power of attorney. (See "A Brief Look – Advance Directives.") He is a devout Jehovah's Witness who doesn't believe in blood transfusions and she is a Methodist. What's the right thing to do?
- ? You are the Home Health Aide for a patient who is receiving insulin twice a day. She told you she had just eaten a large piece of strawberry shortcake. She asked you not to tell the nurse. What's the right thing to do?

By the way, there may not be a "right" answer to any of these!

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Quiz

Employee: _____ Date: _____

Graded By (RN): _____ Grade: _____

1. Ethics means a standard of conduct. There are seven ethical principles presented in this lesson. One of them is beneficence. Beneficence means being fair.
 - a) True
 - b) False
2. Justice means being fair.
 - a) True
 - b) False
3. On the way to your patient's home, you plan to give her a bath first and then make the bed. When you arrive, she wants you to make her bed first and then give her a bath. You do it as she asked. That is an example of practicing autonomy.
 - a) True
 - b) False
4. Your patient is terminally ill and has about two months left to live. She has an out-of-hospital do not resuscitate order in place. She is choking on her food so you call 911. The paramedics begin CPR and put in a breathing tube. Is this right?
 - a) True
 - b) False