

Ethics Topics for Nursing Professionals

Bioethical Services of Virginia, Inc.

Professional Boundaries and Nursing Ethics

Description: This highly interactive, case-based seminar will present an overview of ethical issues that develop when providers and recipients fail to recognize professional boundaries. By examining actual case consultations, we will explore key concepts and generate a better understanding of the relationship between healthcare personnel and the individuals whom they serve.

Objectives:

1. To define professional boundaries and dual relationships in an ethically useful way.
2. To explore difficult cases where boundary crossings are difficult to identify or avoid.
3. To demonstrate tools and policies that can be of use in avoiding inappropriate boundary crossings.

Who Decides: The Ethical Limits of Individual Choice

Description: This interactive session will examine circumstances in which service providers and recipients of services disagree about the details of a service plan. We will discuss the appropriate role of autonomy and define its limits. We will consider case studies in which individuals should be permitted a dignity of risk, cases in which paternalistic intervention is justified, and situations in which autonomy may be limited in order to protect others from harm or offense.

Objectives:

1. To review the concepts of autonomy, paternalism and fairness.
2. To identify the limits of individual choice in order to protect those individuals from self-generated harm.
3. To identify the limits of individual choice in order to protect others from harm.
4. To clarify the ethical conflict between an individual's right to make potentially dangerous decisions and staff's obligation to protect individuals from harm.

Discharge Ethics

Description: This interactive session will provide an analysis of ethical issues related to discharge. In many cases, patients have indicated a desire for a particular discharge plan or are reticent to accept a plan recommended by staff. We will examine the degree to which patients may ethically control their own discharge planning.

Objectives:

1. To examine the implications of patient autonomy in the discharge planning process.
2. To identify ethical tensions between inpatient providers and community providers.
3. To analyze the proper role of surrogate decision makers in discharge planning.

The Ethics of Consent

This highly interactive session will provide an overview of the ethical aspects of informed consent. We will consider the value of autonomy and examine a variety of case studies that test the limits of its force when the desires of a patient come into conflict with professional goals or family wishes. We will be especially attentive to the conditions under which autonomy might ethically be limited in order to protect the patient or others from harm.

Comfort and Tolerance

This highly interactive session will continue the discussion that began when considering informed consent by examining specific conflicts between providers and recipients of care in which providers might consider a) withholding information, b) altering the presentation of facts in order to influence patient judgment, or c) limit patient options in order to achieve good clinical outcomes. This session may be taken in addition to the session on Consent, or independently.

Disaster Ethics

Description: This highly interactive seminar will review ethical issues that arise when dealing with disaster planning and response.

Objectives:

1. To provide a philosophical understanding of the most significant ethical issues that emerge when dealing with extreme disaster scenarios.
2. To discuss issues of allocation of resources in times of disaster.
3. To discuss staff obligations to stay on post during disasters.
4. To discuss the facility powers and authorities in preparing for disaster relief.

The Ethics of Compulsory Vaccination

Description: This interactive discussion will explore the ethical implications of requiring vaccinations of children even in the face of parental opposition. We will consider ethical arguments that derive from the needs of children, the rights of parents, and the impact on public health.

Objectives:

1. To review the concept of distributive justice as it applies to public health concerns.
2. To define the circumstances under which parental rights to control healthcare for their children may and may not be overridden.
3. To consider the potential ethical conflicts that arise when a duty to treat contradicts the privacy and autonomy rights of families.

Conflict and Control: The Ethics of Managing Life Limiting Illness

Description: This highly interactive session will provide a discussion of ethical issues that develop when providers, patients and family members must make decisions about the plan of care and goals of treatment for individuals with life limiting illnesses. We will consider capacity issues and surrogate decision making, the relationship between a patient's previously stated wishes and the family's choices about end of life care, and the role of provider's personal values when educating patients about their options. This session will combine a review of law and policy with discussion of case studies.

Objectives:

1. To review basic law regarding capacity and surrogate decision making.
2. To define the ethical limitations on surrogate decision making.
3. To examine the ethical implications of concepts such as quality of life, palliative care and futility.

Research Ethics

Description: This highly interactive session will consider a variety of ethical considerations in clinical research including informed consent, potential harm to test subjects, and the use of children and prisoners in research protocols.

Cloning and Genetic Engineering

Description: In this highly interactive session we will consider the ethical issues that are generated by the use of cloning and genetic engineering technologies in humans. We will discuss a series of ethical arguments that either support or attack the use of relevant technologies including, but not limited to, possible distinctions between treatment and enhancement or that which is natural or unnatural, religious arguments, arguments about personal freedom, and the rights of parents to control the characteristics of their offspring.

The Ethical Use of Collected Tissue

Is it ethical for tissue samples taken from patients to be used for medical research even if explicit consent for such use has not been obtained? Does a profit incentive impact the ethical use of genetic material or tissue? Do patients have the right to be compensated for the use of their tissue? We will discuss these and many other topics in our interactive discussion of the ethics of clinical research on collected tissue.