

Corporate Values

The Health Care Corporation of St. John's believes in and promotes the following statement of values. We will be guided by these values in our decision-making and in all our activities.

Respect for Person

We respect the dignity of all persons.

The Caring Community

We believe that care is shown by the attitudes and actions of our health care community.

Justice and Fairness

We are committed to most equitable allocation of available resources.

Collaboration

We believe that communication, teamwork, and partnerships are essential.

The Pursuit of Excellence

We are committed to providing the highest standard of care delivered in a learning environment.



Ethics Consultation Service

November 2002

At times, having to make health care decisions for yourself, for someone you love, or for a patient you are taking care of, can be very difficult. It may be hard to decide what is best for you to do. An ethics consultation can help you work to an ethical decision in a difficult case.

What is an "Ethical Decision"?

"Ethics" examines our basic moral values, helping us understand what we should or should not do. Often values can conflict with one another. For example, most people value telling the truth. They also value acting in a way that will not harm other people. But what if telling someone the truth about their medical condition could cause them harm? Any time two or more moral values conflict, an ethical decision must be made.

The Health Care Corporation of St. John's offers an Ethics Consultation Service for patients, families and staff. It is available to anyone who needs help making difficult ethical decisions about patient care. The following programs have an Ethics and Values Committee:

- ◆ Adult Health: Cardiac/Critical Care; Medicine; Emergency/Ambulatory Care; Surgery; Perioperative; Women's Health.
- ◆ Maternal/Child
- ◆ Mental Health
- ◆ Rehabilitation/Continuing Care

How Can an Ethics Consultation Help Me?

An ethics consult is an opportunity to discuss an ethical issue and decision you must make. You will meet with others familiar with your situation, and who have experience dealing with the kind of decision you must make. Those involved in the Ethics Consultation will not tell you what to do, but they will help you understand and resolve your conflicting values and feelings.

The Ethics Consultation will provide an opportunity to discuss the issue/concern with a group who will bring a variety of viewpoints and opinions that may assist with your decision-making. The committee's purpose is to assist you in your decision making and not to make a decision for you.

The Ethics Consultation provides a safe environment and objective process for open and honest discussion among interested and involved parties. This process presumes the right to confidentiality and privacy for all participants. The richness of this process lies in the openness and free discussion that it fosters.

Who Will be Present at an Ethics Consultation?

Who attends an ethics review will depend on the issue and the kind of consultation requested. We encourage open and frank discussion of all ethical concerns, but we recognize a decision can be a very private matter. Only those involved in the particular case such as the patient, substitute decision maker, family member, care provider or resource person will attend. The ethics review group to discuss a case will normally include:

- ◆ The person(s) who requests the ethics review, this includes a patient, substitute decision-maker, family member or staff member.
- ◆ At least one support person for the one who has made the request (if he or she wishes to have a support person). Two or three members of the Ethics Committee. Informed people are available from each of the clinical programs.
- ◆ A professional ethicist.
- ◆ The physician responsible for primary care.



- ◆ One or two other members of the patient's care team (eg. nurse, pastoral worker, social worker, respiratory therapist, etc.) who are most familiar with the case.

Ethics review is not intended to address personal problems between patients and staff, between family members, or between staff members. Other avenues are available to handle such issues.

What Kinds of Ethical Decisions Can We Help People With?

The Ethics Consultation Service will help people with many different kinds of ethical decisions. Examples include:

- ◆ Should we turn off the respirator and allow this (terminally ill) patient die?
- ◆ Should we consent to the insertion of a feeding tube?
- ◆ Should we tell our father he has cancer and only has a short time to live?
- ◆ We want to do what is best for our child, but we don't know what that is. How do we decide?
- ◆ How can we provide the best discussion with people who may be incompetent due to mental illness or is developmentally delayed?



ate attention, while other issues allow more time for discussion. The Ethics Consultation Service will respond to a request in the shortest time possible. In an emergency situation, a full review and broad discussion may not be possible, but a member of the service will be available upon request. A full review and broad discussion can usually be arranged within three days.

What Information Should I Provide When I Make a Request?

Please provide, where possible, the following information:

- ◆ Brief description of the issue/concern.
- ◆ At which hospital has the issue/concern arisen.
- ◆ Names of other individuals who may be able to provide further information.
- ◆ Please note any deadlines that those arranging the review should be aware of.



What Happens to My Request?

Your request will be reviewed with you by a member of the Ethics Committee, usually within 2—3 days, to ensure that you

have been given enough information to explore all your options.

If you still wish to have your issue/concern addressed by an Ethics Consultation group, a meeting will be arranged.

How Can I Arrange for an Ethics Consultation?

All patients, family and staff can bring forward an issue for an ethics review by calling or writing, or ask a staff member to make the contact for you.

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