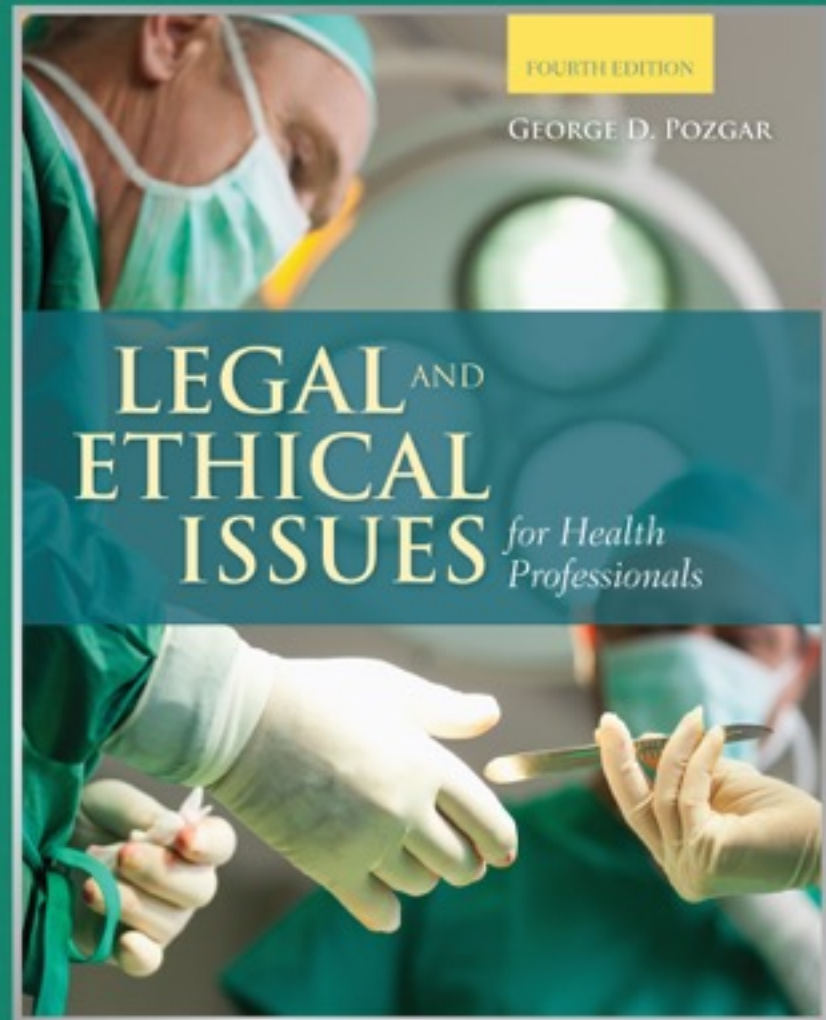


# Chapter 4

## Health Care Ethics Committee



# Learning Objectives

- Describe the function and purpose of ethics committees.
- Describe the structure and goals of ethics committees.
- Explain the consultation process of ethics committees.
- Describe the expanding role of ethics committees.
- Discuss why the resolution of ethical dilemmas is no easy task.

# Ethics Committee

- *A health care ethics committee* is an advisory body whose purpose is to facilitate discussion and consultation on ethical issues arising in the patient care setting.

# Committee Composition

- Ethicist
- Educator
- Caregiver
- Legal advisor
- Political leader
- Religious leader
- Corporate leader

# Committee Goals – I

- Provide a forum for review and discussion of ethical and moral issues relative to patient care.
- Provide information to patients as to the functioning of the ethics committee and how to access the committee at the time of admission.
- Serve as support and resource for hospital staff, families, and patients.
- Provide consultation, as requested, when there are conflicts in care options.

# Committee Goals – II

- Provide assistance in clarifying situations that are ethical, legal, or religious in nature that extend beyond the scope of daily practice.
- Clarify issues and discuss alternatives to ethical dilemmas.
- Promote patient rights.

# Committee Goals – III

- Assist the patient and family in coming to consensus with the options that best meet the patient's care needs.
- Review cases for educational purposes.
- Enhance the ethical tenor of both the hospital and health care professionals.

# Committee Functions

- Develop policies and procedures.
- Provide education.
- Consultation and conflict resolution.
- Review ethics committee's effectiveness.

# Education – I

- Ethics committee members
- Community
- Patients and family
- Staff
  - Ambulatory care facilities
  - Home health agencies
  - Long-term care facilities
  - Physician office practices

# Education – II

- Recognize time commitment.
- Include training in philosophy, religion, medicine, and law.
- Include formal training and experience in clinical ethics.
- Develop and distribute appropriate materials for committee members, caregivers, patients, and family.

# Education – III

- Promote patient rights.
  - Right to self-determination (autonomy)
    - Accept or reject care and treatment
- Right to ethics committee consultation.

# Consultation and Conflict Resolution

- Requests for committee consultations.
- Provide guidance, not decisions.
- Strive to achieve consensus when addressing care dilemmas.

# Requests for Consultation – I

- Clarification of issues
- Determining decision-making capacity
- Informed consent
- Advance directives
- Withdrawal of treatment
- Should be conducted in a timely manner

# Requests for Consultation – II

- Who may request a consultation?
  - Patient
  - Family member
  - Staff
  - Physician

# Conducting a Consultation

- Identify the dilemma.
- Identify relevant facts.
- Identify stakeholders.
- Identify moral issues.
- Identify legal issues.
- Conduct consultation.

# Expanding Role of Ethics Committees

## *Internal Issues*

- Dilemma of blind drug trials
- Informed consent
- Privacy and confidentiality

# Expanding Role of Ethics Committees

## *External Issues*

- Does the ethics committee have a role in addressing questionable reimbursement schemes?
- Should an ethics committee have its own letterhead? What value would this serve?
- What role, if any, should an ethics committee play in the following scenario?

# Convening the Ethics Committee: Rules to Follow

- Serve as a *resource* when there are no clear choices.
- Be *sensitive* to patient and family values.
- *Search* for the best path to conflict resolution.
- *Assist* family in reaching for consensus.
- *Educate and guide* the process without personal biases.

# Facing Ethical Dilemmas: Guidelines

- Seek to diagnose before you prescribe.
- *Not sure what to do* – discuss your dilemma with other committee members.
- Do not impose your beliefs on others.
- Help guide others to make choices.
- Ask the patient how you might help.

# Resolution of Ethical Dilemmas

- Perplexing task.
- Ethics committee member must be prepared to understand the challenge by actively participating in the decision-making process without bias.

## Important Considerations Ethics Committee Members

- Accept the patient's wishes.
- Accept the dialogue of committee members with varying beliefs.
- Help the ethics committee seek a morally acceptable resolution to an ethical dilemma.
- Do not be fearful to seek clarification of issues and ask questions.
- Contribute to making consultations meaningful and not argumentative.
- Allow compassion to outweigh the need to be right.
- The ultimate decision is not committee members to make.
- Provide guidance, consultation, and education.

# Text Case:

## *Patient Refuses Blood*

- Should the physician refuse to treat this patient? Explain your answer.
- Should the family have a right to override the patient's decision to refuse blood? Explain your answer.

# Text Case:

## *A Son's Guilt, A Father's Wishes*

- Discuss the ethical dilemmas in this case.
- Discuss the issues and the role of the ethics committee in this case.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of an ethics committee?
- Discuss the functions of an ethics committee.
- Explain the consultative role of the ethics committee.
- Discuss the educational role of the ethics committee.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS, cont'd

- Discuss the ever-expanding role of ethics committees, including internal operational issues and external influences that affect internal operations.
- Discuss what ethics members should take into consideration when addressing ethical dilemmas.