All About Hospital Ethics Services

Session 1
May 6, 2021

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What Does an Ethics Service Do?

- Helps identify, analyze and solve ethical problems in the clinical setting
- Does not evaluate or penalize physicians, nurses or staff
- Does not make a judgment about who is a good or bad person
What Are the Services?

- Education
- Policy creation and review
- Consultation
Types of Ethics Services

• A wide range of services are often lumped under the title of “ethics committee.” These range from being minimally functional, in an attempt to meet Joint Commission requirements, to a comprehensive hospital ethics service.

• This leads to serious misunderstanding of the role and value of an ethics service by hospital administration, physicians, nurses and other health professionals.

• There is a direct relationship between the administrative commitment to an ethics service and the ethics services which should be offered.
Membership

• Who (and who should not) be on the Service?
• For how long?
• In what role?

The answers to these questions depend in part on the scope of the Ethics Service.
Administrative Support

Ethics committees are NOT ordinary hospital committees. They are a component of a comprehensive Ethics Service and entail:

- Special training for members
- Time commitment
- Expertise and skills
- Continuing education
- Etc.
Institutional Benefits

• Administration
• Physicians, nurses, social workers and staff
• Patients and families
• Risk Management
• General Counsel
• Accreditation
• Positive community regard
• Etc.
Education

- Ethics Service providers / committee members
- Ethics consultants
- Clinicians and staff
- Patients
- General public
- Others
Policy Creation and Review

- Policy “ownership”
- Frequency of review
- When a new policy is needed
- Collaboration with affected services
- Managing disagreement
- Compromise and re-review
- Institutional policies made public
Policy Examples

- DNR; perioperative DNR
- Advance Directives
- Withdrawing/withholding
- Surrogates, proxies
- Transplant and DNC
- Abortion
- Religious accommodation
- Privacy

- COVID and allocation
- Information blocking
- Minors’ access to records
- Posthumous gamete acquisition and use
- Artificial Intelligence
- ECMO
- Genetics, genomics
Consultation

• 24/7 availability?
• Facilitation and expert consultations
• Working with guardians, surrogates, proxies and social-worker proxies
• Do health care professionals know what an ethics consultation is and how to request one?
• Consult frequency and coverage
• Charting ethics consults the EHR
• Consultant, team or committee?
Next Sessions

May 13
May 20

Please complete the evaluation.

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