



Palliative Institute

Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Community of Practice

Ethical Decision Making in Palliative Care

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Reminders

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- Your microphones are muted. When we invite participation, please unmute yourself if you'd like to speak at that time.
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Ethics in End-of-Life Care

Presenter : Cecilia Marion, Clinical Ethicist

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that lands upon which Covenant Health facilities are situated is the traditional ancestral territory of a diversity of Indigenous peoples and home to Treaty 4, 6, 7, and 8.

We honor the Blackfoot Confederacy – Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika, the Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, the Tsuu T'ina Nation and the Métis People of Alberta.

This includes the six Métis Settlements and the twenty-two Districts of the Otipemisiwak government within the Métis Nation of Alberta, that reside within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland.

We recognize and give thanks to the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations, all who continue to grace these lands, and all future generations.

We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers, Matriarchs and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us.

We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.



Learning Objectives

- Understanding current ethical issues in palliative care
- Awareness of Principles and Values underlying the ethical issues
- Practical Tool for a process for Ethical Decision Making

What makes end-of-life care ethically challenging?

Delivering Clinical Care

- *Clinical care and decision-making*
- *Communicating with patients and families.*
- *Confidentiality*
- *Goals of care*
- *Mental capacity*

What makes end-of-life care ethically challenging?

Working With Families

- *Care and support of the family*
- *Families as decision makers*
- *Genetics*
- *Privacy*

What makes end-of-life care ethically challenging?

Engaging With Institutional Structures and Values

- *Conflict with institutional policies*
- *Institutional resource allocation*
- *Conflict between healthcare professionals*

What makes end-of-life care ethically challenging?

Navigating Societal Values and Expectations

- *MAiD*
- *Access to specialist palliative care services*
- *Cultural and spiritual considerations*

Application of Ethical Principles

- *Autonomy*
- *Dignity*
- *Truth-telling*
- *Doctrine of double effect*
- *Equity in care*

Ethical Responsibilities in Healthcare

Healthcare staff have an ethical obligation to

- benefit the patient
- to avoid or minimize harm
- to respect the values and preferences of the patient

Principles of Clinical Ethics

- Beneficence
- Nonmaleficence
- Autonomy
 - Informed Consent
 - Truth Telling
 - Confidentiality
- Justice

Values Considered in Ethical Reflection

- Dignity of the Human Person
- Interconnectedness of every human person
- Stewardship and care for creation, each other and the common good
- Respect for life from conception until death
- Charity and Solidarity, emphasis on the poor and marginalized

Why think about ethics?

“Everyone’s character and the practices of every profession are subject to continual (if not cataclysmic) change; this, then requires a certain routine vigilance with respect to reflecting on whom we want to become, what we are willing to do, and how we should interact with those around us” ~Hester et. al. 2012

Our response is stronger when we can show careful attention to the reasons given for choosing one moral judgment over another.

What ethical reflection can achieve.

- Brings our values to awareness
- Clarifies our aims
- Discern what is important
- Take ownership of our decisions

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

1. Define the Issue - begins the very important process of reaching consensus regarding what the issue actually is.

2. Acknowledge feelings

- What are the 'gut' reactions?
- What biases, loyalties and intuitions are present?

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

3. Clarify the facts as much as possible
 - Establish the facts of the issue (who, what, where, when, why, how)
 - Establish what we do not know
 - Describe the relevant factors (social, economic, political, legal)

4. Identify stakeholders and the various perspectives
 - Clarify perspectives:
 - How do you see this issue(s)
 - Name the perspectives of the various participants

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

5. Analyze the values

- What values are at stake?
- Determine value conflicts:
 - What values are being affirmed?
 - What values are being negated?

6. Identify alternative courses of action in light of our mission, vision and values

- What are the options?
- What are the pros and cons of each option, including doing nothing?

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

7. Make a decision

- What option best advances the vision, mission, values and strategic directions of Covenant Health?
- Are there any contingency plans in case the decision does not have the intended outcomes or deals with possible conflicts?

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

8. Implement the decision

- Who will implement the decision?
- How and when will the decision be communicated to all stakeholders?
- What process and criteria for measuring will be used to evaluate the decision and outcome?

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

9. Revisit and examine the decision-making process
 - What happened?
 - What went well?
 - What did we learn? What learning can we take forward into the next situation

Examples of Ethics Consultations

- **End of Life** — Family member who is ADM does not want goals of care changes to Comfort Care even though resident is at end of life.
- **Patient's needs not congruent with Long Term Care** — New resident in long term care does not truly fit in LTC environment. They are young and have mental health issues.
- **Family Members Struggle to Agree** - Family members cannot agree among themselves when a decision maker is needed for planning treatments and discharge goals.
- **Living at Risk** - Loving family continues to feed their son with disabilities who cannot eat orally due to high risk of aspiration.

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- Geng, S., Zhang, L., Zhang, Q., & Wu, Y. (2026). Ethical dilemmas for palliative care nurses: systematic review. *BMJ supportive & palliative care*, 16(4), 810–817. <https://doi.org/10.1136/spcare-2023-004742>

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Evaluation



<https://redcap.link/ds6ibuxf>

Upcoming Session

November 26th 2026 2-3pm MST

Skin Integrity and Wound Care



Speaker: **Sherry A. Irwin**, RN, BN, Rural Continuing Care RAI Coordinator
Covenant

For more information contact: sheila.killoran@covenanthealth.ca

Thank You!

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