

Community Ethics Toolkit

This toolkit was created on behalf of the members of the following project:



**Ethical Decision Making for the
Community Health and Support Sector**

Additional Resources

Web Site Links

University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics <http://www.utoronto.ca/jcb/home/main.htm>

Canadian Bioethics Society. www.bioethics.ca

Online home of author and bioethicist, M. Sara Rosenthal Ph.D. www.sarahealth.com. Click on "bioethics" and then "general bioethics information"

The Canadian resource for hospital ethic committees www.ethicscommittee.ca

W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics. An independent unit in the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of British Columbia. <http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/>

Bioethics.com: your global information source for bioethics news and issues. www.bioethics.com

Books

The Ethical Canary—Science, Society and the Human Spirit. Margaret Somerville. 2000. Penguin Books, Canada.

Appendix A: Phase 4 Steering Committee Members

Sharry Steeves, Chair, Nightingale Health Care Inc.

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Introduction

Ethical dilemmas are frequently encountered by community health and support workers, including case managers, nurses, personal support workers, and others. Acknowledging the lack of adequate resources within the community sector to support staff in dealing with such complex issues, a **common approach** for ethical decision-making was developed and trialed across 12 community organizations.

The goal of the common approach was to *enhance practice around ethical decision-making in the community health sector*. This would mean that all members of the community health care team, regardless of their discipline or the organization in which they are employed, would have access to the same resources and would approach ethical dilemmas in a similar manner. This in turn, would facilitate collaboration in delivering client-centred care, improve worker satisfaction, and achieve greater consistency in practice across the sector.

Based on the results of the pilot and the feedback received, the **Community Ethics Toolkit** was developed. This toolkit was created to facilitate the broader implementation of the common approach for ethical decision making across the community health and support sector.

The toolkit consists of the following components:

1. Code of Ethics for community health and support sector of Toronto
2. A decision-making worksheet
3. Guidelines for using the decision-making worksheet
4. Guidelines for conducting case reviews
5. Additional resources.

Although organizations interested in applying the toolkit to their setting may choose to modify its contents to better reflect their own needs and considerations, it is requested that any modifications to the toolkit be forwarded to the Toronto Community Care Access Centre at Toronto_CCAC@toronto.cac-ont.ca.

To facilitate sharing, the toolkit is available electronically.

Background

The “Ethical-Decision Making in Community Health and Support Sector” project is an illustration of the accomplishments that can be achieved through sustained leadership, commitment, and collaboration. The development of the Community Ethics Toolkit is a result of the key milestones and activities achieved over the past four years:

- Phase 1** In the fall of 2000 and through funding from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), a research and consultation program was launched that focused on a cross-sectoral response to the human resource issues affecting the recruitment and retention of community workers. One of the final recommendations of this project addressed the need for developing cross-sectoral supports to assist staff with practice-based ethical issues related to the safety of clients, worker safety, and consent. This recommendation led to a multi-phased collaboration among various community organizations.
- Phase 2** (Oct’01-June’02): A Round-Table event was held to discuss the development of a shared Code of Ethics for the community health sector. This session was well attended with approximately 200 participants from nearly 40 agencies. A working group was soon established to further examine methods and resources surrounding ethical decision-making.
- Phase 3** (June’02-Fall’03): A Code of Ethics was drafted, as well as a Decision Making Framework. These tools would serve as the foundation for a common approach for ethical decision-making amongst members of the community health team. This phase was completed with an agreement to pilot these tools.
- Phase 4** (Fall’03-spring’04): A pilot of the common approach, including staff education, a community code of ethics, a decision-making worksheet, structured case reviews, and access to an Ethicist was conducted from September’03 to April’04. Key findings and recommendations were identified in the evaluation phase, and facilitated the establishment of the Community Ethics Toolkit.

Code of Ethics for the Community Health and Support Sector

The Code of Ethics was created to express the common values of the community sector, and to serve as a common foundation. When confronted with an ethical dilemma, the Code of Ethics can be used to assist employees in identifying the issues at hand and the areas of tension.

Expanding on the more commonly known ethical principles (i.e. beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice), additional principles have been incorporated to reflect the unique considerations of the community sector. Furthermore, the code is written in more laymans terms to facilitate its interpretation.

A total of ten principles are addressed in the code:

- Advocacy
- Client confidentiality
- Commitment to quality services
- Conflict of interest
- Dignity
- Employee safety
- Fair and equitable access
- Health and well-being
- Informed choice and empowerment
- Relationship among community agencies

The Code of Ethics for the Community Health and Support Sector can be found on the last page of the Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet.

Overview: Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet

The decision-making worksheet was created to provide a step-by-step tool to guide staff through the process of resolving an ethical dilemma. Comprised of four key sections (which can be identified by the acronym below “IDEA”) the worksheet takes into account the facts, emotions, ethical principles, various alternatives and their potential consequences, and evaluation of the outcomes:

1. **Identify the facts**
2. **Determine the ethical principles in conflict**
3. **Explore the options**
4. **Act on the decision and evaluate**

The decision-making worksheet can be utilized in several ways, such as:

- when a staff member is out in the field and is faced with an ethical dilemma
- during a formal or informal case review *i.e. as a framework to facilitate the discussion*
- for information-sharing purposes *i.e. to communicate the lessons learned.*

Through its application, the decision-making worksheet will assist staff to address complex and challenging issues in a comprehensive and logical manner. As required (e.g. during a case review or audit), the decision-making worksheet can also be used to justify challenging decisions that were made.

Guidelines for Using the Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet

Step 1: Identify the facts

Gather information/facts on the case: The purpose of this section is to identify what is known versus what is not known. It prompts participants to take into account all of the relevant considerations and stakeholders; this often includes facts (actual and potential) that may not be evident initially.

Reflect on the different emotions: Reflecting on one's emotions, feelings, and values is an important step as it may influence how one responds or reacts to a particular situation. It is important for the employee to be aware of such emotions/values/biases and to act accordingly (e.g. if they cannot remain objective, they should remove themselves from the situation and ask a peer/manager to become involved). Furthermore, it is also important to consider the thoughts and emotions as well as the cultural traditions of the client and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. family, caregiver, etc.) as this can assist the employee to further understand the issues. The worksheet does not provide a space for documenting directly in this section; employees are instructed to identify and reflect on, rather than to document these emotions/feelings/values. This is simply to minimize the risk of this information being prejudicial to employees.

Step 2: Determine the ethical principles in conflict

Identifying the ethical principles in conflict will not provide solutions, however this step will assist to further clarify and articulate the issues. You may find that there is not an ethical dilemma (e.g. that it is purely a legal issue). In this case, the decision-making framework can still be applied to assist with resolution of the issue.

Step 3: Explore options

Explore options and consider their strengths and weaknesses. The intent of this section is to brainstorm different alternatives and to consider the potential outcomes and impacts of each one (e.g. evaluate the potential positive and negative considerations of each option).

The selected option is not necessarily the one with the highest number of positive considerations and/or the lowest number of negative considerations. Each option must be rated based on the magnitude of its advantages and disadvantages.

Step 4: Act on your decision and evaluate

Develop an action plan. Once the decision has been made, document the action plan in the client's chart. Also decide how to communicate the plan to the client and relevant stakeholders in order to maximize its acceptance and understanding. Ongoing communication with the client and other stakeholders is critical.

Evaluate the plan. Were the intended results obtained, or is additional follow-up and/or action required? Ongoing documentation and communication of the evaluation is necessary.

Self-evaluate your decision. These types of situations are often difficult for employees and can be emotionally exhausting. Not only it is important to reflect on the decision-making process and outcomes achieved, it is also important to reflect on one's feelings with respect to the situation.

Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet

- I Identify the facts
- D Determine the ethical principles in conflict
- E Explore the options
- A Act on your decision and evaluate

Step 1: Identify the Facts

Gather information/facts on the case

Re-state the details of the case. What are the main issues or areas of concern/tension? Who are the individuals involved/who else needs to be involved? How does the client's history/prognosis affect this case? Are there other factors to consider, including company policies, directives and regulation?

Reflect on the different emotions

Reflect on the emotions of: 1) the client, 2) family/others and 3) you. Examine the emotional factors influencing each individual, such as existing feelings, values, biases and prior experiences. **Ask yourself:** How do I feel about this particular client/family? How are my life experiences influencing my reaction? What are the family/cultural/societal traditions and customs that are influencing my reaction?

Step 2: Determine the Ethical Principles in Conflict

Identify ethical issues (i.e. what ethical principles are in conflict?)

Refer to Community Health Code of Ethics on the last page for further details.

Principle	Explain the Issue

Step 3: Explore Options

Explore options and consider their strengths and weaknesses

Brainstorm and discuss options either alone or with peers. Be creative and use your imagination. Consider a compromise. Predict the outcomes for each alternative. Does the alternative fit with the client/family values? Question whether the alternative meets the company policies, directives and regulations.

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses

Step 4: Act on Your Decision and Evaluate

Develop an action plan (Note: the actual plan should be documented in the chart)

Given all the information that you have, choose the best option available. Develop an action plan. Present your suggested alternative and action plan to the client and those involved in such a way that it allows them to accept the plan. Re-examine the alternatives if other factors come to light, if the situation changes, or if an agreement cannot be reached. Determine when to evaluate the plan. Document and communicate the plan

Step 4: continued

Evaluate the plan

What was the outcome of the plan? Are changes necessary? Document the evaluation.

Self-evaluate your decision

How do you feel about the decision and the outcome? What would you do differently next time? What would you do the same? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about this decision-making process?

CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SUPPORT SECTOR OF TORONTO

We, as employees of Community Health and Support Sector organizations, are committed to being an integral part of the communities we serve. We are responsible for: acting professionally and in a client-centred manner; upholding the dignity and honour of our clients; and practicing in accordance with ethical principles. This Code of Ethics is intended to provide us with specific ethical principles to address situations that we may encounter, and to guide us in our relationships with clients, family members and others in the support team, other health care practitioners, and the public. This code is intended to complement laws, codes and standards of professional practice.

Advocacy: We have the responsibility to help improve the awareness, the accessibility and the quality of our services by advocating on behalf of our clients. We will seek guidance both internally and externally from our organization for those situations that could place the organization and/or its clients at risk.

Client Confidentiality: Client information is confidential; we will ensure that clients and their legal substitute are informed of their right to consent to the sharing of necessary information with individuals and organizations directly involved in the client's care.

Commitment to Quality Services: We are committed to providing the highest quality services that will benefit our clients within available resources.

Conflict of Interest: We will not compromise services to our clients for our own personal benefit.

Dignity: In all our interactions we will demonstrate profound respect for human dignity. We will be responsive and sensitive to the diversity among our clients and staff groups.

Employee Safety: We recognize that the community work setting provides a unique working environment for all of us. We will take necessary measures to ensure our personal safety, and all safety concerns will be reported and addressed in a supportive and non-threatening way. After all options have been considered, we may withdraw service if our safety is compromised.

Fair and Equitable Access: We believe that each individual is entitled to an assessment. We will ensure that services are based on clients' needs, regardless of their income, age, gender, ethnicity or race, physical or mental ability, and any other factors such as diverse behaviors or lifestyle.

Health and Well Being: We will use a holistic approach to clients' health care needs by acknowledging all things important to them in their community.

Informed Choice and Empowerment: We believe that most individuals have the ability and the right to make decisions about their health. We will assist clients to make care plans and life choices in keeping with the client's values, beliefs and health care goals. We will ensure that clients are fully informed of their options and have all the information they need to make informed decisions about their health. If the client is mentally incapable of making these decisions, we will take directions from the client's legal substitute.

Relationships Among Community Agencies: We recognize there may be a competitive element in our working relationships, however we agree to respect one another's roles and to work together in the spirit of collaboration to maximize the effectiveness of client services.

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Guidelines for Conducting Case Reviews

One of the most prominent findings of the pilot project was staff's request to continue providing case reviews on a regular basis. As expressed by one participant "It is extremely useful to have the opportunity to openly discuss a case with your peers and supervisor; you see things in a different way by doing so...when else do we have the opportunity to learn from each other?"

The following information is intended to guide community health care and support workers in conducting case reviews. The term "case review" is used broadly, and refers to a forum whereby staff would have the opportunity to engage in a group discussion about a particular case in an open and non-threatening environment. Past, current, or fictional cases may be used during the reviews.

1. Case reviews can be used to help resolve current issues, or can be used with cases on a retrospective basis to reflect on previous decisions made. The learning acquired from case reviews may be shared with others throughout the organization e.g. through a staff memo, lunch and learns, etc.
2. Participants should include both front-line employees (e.g. nurses, case managers, personal support workers) and managers/supervisors. Consideration may also be given towards inviting other key players such as other individuals involved in with the client.
3. The Code of Ethics for the Community Health and Support Sector can be reviewed prior to using the worksheet. This will assist in providing the context for the discussion.
4. The worksheet can be worked through one section at a time. The prompting questions in *italic* (located at the top of each section) can help to guide the process.
5. It should be noted where additional information is needed e.g. do you need to consult with a lawyer to clarify an issue?
6. As required, a follow-up meeting should be scheduled to review the outcomes of the decisions that were made.