



Ethical Decision Making in a Pandemic

Bonnie Cham, MD

Katarina Lee-Ameduri, JD, MA



Objectives of the Presentation

- Ethical Decision Making Under Normal Operations
- How implicit bias may affect decision making
- Public Health Ethics Principles Operative during a pandemic when there is a surge in demand for clinical services.





Ethics



....a roadmap to doing the right thing



Ethical Dilemmas



Choices are difficult when:

- There is more than one option which is legally available
- The options are equally compelling and mutually exclusive



Ethical Considerations under Normal Operations

Factors which enter into ethical decision making:

- Values
- Ethical principles
- Rules, duties and obligations
- Consequences and outcomes
- Relationships



Caution!

- Our decision making may be affected by conscious (explicit) or unconscious (implicit) biases.
- Unconscious bias may be exaggerated when we need to make decisions quickly
- Awareness of our own implicit biases is the most effective way to combat it.
- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/canada/takeatest.html>

Basic Ethics Principles

- **Beneficence:** Intervention, policy etc. has to benefit the population
- **Non-maleficence:** Do no harm principle
- **Autonomy:** The ability to make a decision based upon philosophical, religious, spiritual or secular preference.
 - **Informed Consent:** Does the individual understand the risks, benefits, consequences and alternatives?
- **Justice:** Is the intervention, policy etc. being applied fairly?

Shift to Providing Care when there is a Surge in Demand

- Still a focus on individual care in our ethical decision making with patients regarding their care. Goals of care discussion remains vital.
- Operational requirements such as resource stewardship, and redeployment of staff will change our work environment.
- What are the principles upon which these decisions are made.

Public Health Ethics Principles

- Individual Liberty vs. Solidarity
- Protection of the Public
- Proportionality
- Duty to Provide Care
- Stewardship

In Conclusion

- Decision making for individual patients should continue to be guided by clinical indications and ethical principles. Resources are available through the WRHA and the Réseau Compassion Network for both decision making guides and ethics consultation.
- Principles and priorities shift as we move from normal operations to surge mode. Shared Health has developed a COVID 19 Health Ethics framework based on principles widely recognized in North America as being important to guide decision making in a pandemic situation. This is available on the Shared Health website.

Ethics Contact Information

- Bonnie Cham, MD
Ethics@sharedhealthmb.ca
- Katarina Lee-Ameduri, JD, MA
klee13@sbgh.mb.ca