Ethics Case Consultation

Any member of the care team, the patient, or the family can initiate a formal ethics consultation of the Ethics Advisory Committee.

When a morally troubling or complex problem occurs, there should be:

- a discussion among the immediately involved caregivers;
- an interdisciplinary care conference;
- a meeting with the family

To arrange an informal discussion about ethical dimensions of a patient care situation:

- Call the Ethics Advisory Committee co-chairs at ext 5-6920
- Talk with past or present members

If this standard procedure results in disagreement or the desire to further explore the ethical aspects of decisions, a member of the care team or the family can ask for consultation with the EAC. A Committee co-chair or designated committee member will meet with the consultee to learn more about the problem and the kind of advice caregivers need; a decision will then be made as to whether to initiate a formal consultation.

The caregiver(s) and/or family will then be asked to prepare a brief written synopsis of the case history, present situation and prognosis, and identify the ethical question(s) about which they seek advice. A meeting of and ethics consult team or the full EAC will be scheduled, usually within 24 hours. The attending physician, primary nurse and other caregivers who are directly involved in the care of the patient and family should be notified of this consultation meeting and invited to attend. The family should be informed by the attending physician or designated team member that the EAC has been consulted and will be meeting to discuss the case. The family should also be invited to meet with the EAC. The EAC, caregivers, and/or family together will discuss the case and their ethical concerns. The ethical question(s) to be addressed are identified, and everyone present is invited to give his or her input. If the family is not able to be present, their input may be obtained prior to the meeting and brought up in the discussion.

The EAC will meet after the consultation to discuss and elaborate upon the ethical question(s), analyze the problem(s), apply ethical principles and reasoning, and explore morally permissible alternatives for resolution. The committee's deliberations and advice are communicated verbally to team members immediately following this meeting; a member of the EAC will make a written record in the progress. The attending physician is responsible for communicating the outcome of the ethics consultation to the family as appropriate. The family may request a copy of the consultation.

The EAC will usually provide a more thorough and detailed analysis of the ethical question(s) raised by the consultation, the moral reasoning behind the decision, and advice within 10 days to caregivers as an educational tool. This document does not become part of the patient's permanent record, but may be shared with the family.

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Related Content

- None identified

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