

Ethics Services

Ethics Services at Woodstock Hospital

Ethical issues and challenges arise constantly in the practice of healthcare. From birth to death, admission to discharge, indeed in sickness and in health and from the bedside to the boardroom healthcare, is a values rich enterprise. The goal of the Clinical Ethics program at the Woodstock Hospital is to build ethics capacity and nurture a culture that helps us to support caregivers, patients and their families when providing health care. This site has information about our program to help patients, families, and health care professionals who may be dealing with a difficult ethical issue related to clinical care.

What is Ethics?

Ethics is the systematic examination of facts, beliefs, standards and values in determining the rightness or wrongness of decisions and actions. Ethics is not merely opinion or gut reaction, but involves reasoned deliberation to address the question: "What is the best thing to do, all things considered?" Clinical ethics promotes reflective practice and the making of "right" choices and decisions in the delivery of health care and the treatment of individual patients.

Health care professionals need to consider all aspects of the patient experience when providing care and supporting decisions.

Some examples of clinical ethics issues include:

- whether to withdraw or withhold treatments for a patient at end of life
- conflict between a team and family regarding the perceived safety of a discharge plan for a patient
- conflict between family members when no clear direction from patient or Power of Attorney regarding care
- uncertainty regarding whether a patient is competent to refuse needed treatment

In seeking answers to these questions, clinical ethicists in collaboration with healthcare team members, patients, and family members examine basic ethical principles such as autonomy (the right for individuals to make choices about what happens to them), beneficence (the desire to do good), non-maleficence (the duty to prevent harm), and justice (fairness).

The Ethics Consultation Process

In order to meet the need for ethics support at the Woodstock Hospital an ethics policy and ethical framework have been developed. The Ethics Committee meets on a regular basis and is supported by Dr. Rob Butcher. Dr. Butcher has worked internationally as well as with Accreditation Canada and has extensive experience working as a Clinical Ethicist throughout Ontario. He brings a wealth of knowledge about the ethical challenges facing community and rural healthcare practitioners. He has provided education sessions to the staff and Physicians at Woodstock Hospital and is available for case consultations when required.

How do I contact the Ethics Consultation Service?

Anyone involved in a patient's care may call for support from the Ethics Consultation Service, including: patients, family members, physicians, staff, and learners.

You may contact the Ethics Consultation Service through the Vice President of Patient Care **(519) 421-4218** or by e-mail at ethics@wgh.on.ca. Please leave your name and phone number.

Ethics Consultation is available during regular business hours, Monday to Friday. If outside of regular business hours, or weekends, please leave a message and your call will be returned on the next business day.

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