ETHICS NOVA SCOTIA HEALTH TOOL: AN APPROACH TO WORKING THROUGH ETHICAL QUESTIONS
(SEPTEMBER 2020)

Is this an ethical question? It might be if answering it involves figuring out which balancing of competing values/principles should drive action in a situation

Is this tool for me? This tool was developed for use by all Nova Scotia Health employees, health care providers, and volunteers. Patients and families can use this if they wish, and there's also a separate Patient and Family Ethics Tool (forthcoming) to help support them.

What is this tool intended to do? This tool is designed to help you clarify an ethical question and work through to an answer. It can be used in conjunction with support from Ethics Nova Scotia Health http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/requesting-ethics-support.

Will this tool help with research ethics questions? The Nova Scotia Research Ethics Board provides support regarding research ethics. Information about the Nova Scotia Research Ethics Board is available at https://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/discovery-innovation/ethics.

CORE VALUES:

Actions are assessed in part on how they align with Nova Scotia Health's mission, vision, and values.

Mission: To achieve excellence in health, healing and learning through working together.

Vision: Healthy people, healthy communities – for generations.

Values: Respect, integrity, courage, innovation, and accountability

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

Delivery of health services involves a continual process of balancing values, principles, and interests. Below are some of the important principles and concepts in health care ethics that you might consider as you work through your question.

- Beneficence or doing good: Being guided by the welfare of the patient or client, as defined by the client or patient.

- Best interests: Weighing the benefits and risks in a situation from physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual perspectives.
- Confidentiality: Keeping patient and organizational information private.
- Integrity: Acting in accordance with values and principles.
- Justice: Treating individuals and groups fairly. What this entails depends on context. For example, the focus is different for social justice (addressing and engaging with those affected by decisions), distributive justice (being attentive to how benefits and burdens accrue to groups and individuals), and procedural justice (concern about whether formal rules and procedures are being applied consistently).
- Non-maleficence: Avoiding unnecessary harm.
- Sustainability: An obligation to future users of the health care system to manage resources responsibly, taking the health system as a whole into account.
- Quality of life: Those activities and experiences that provide pleasure, meaning, satisfaction, and enhance well-being, as determined by the person whose life is being assessed.
- Respect for autonomy: Recognizing and respecting an individual's right to self-determination. It is often reflected in offering information to a client or patient to support the patient or client in making a decision that reflects their interests and values.
- Veracity: Being truthful and not intentionally misleading or misinforming patients or clients.
- Equity: A concern with individual and group differences in access to health care and health outcomes, and work to eliminate these differences.
- Accountability: The obligations that result from being responsible to a constituency. Often linked to transparency and openness, it also encompasses aspects such as meeting ethical, legal, and social obligations
- Compassion: The act of "feeling with" in response to suffering and which gives rise to the need to alleviate others' suffering.

Exploration
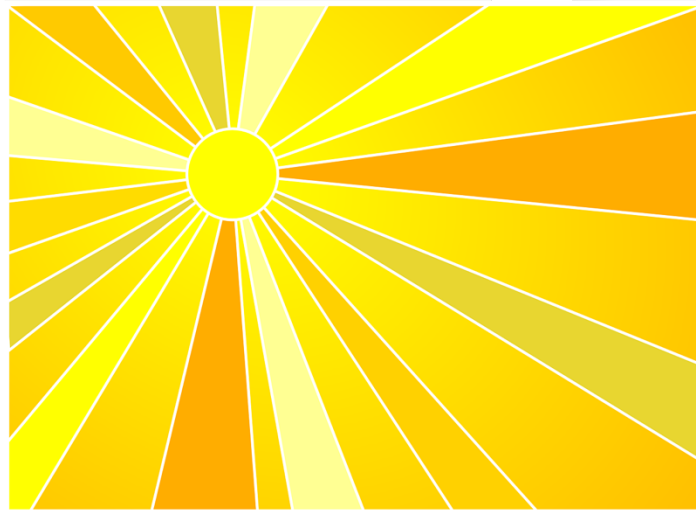- Facts & history of the issue
- Cause of ethical concern
- Stakeholders
- Legal and other constraints
- Relevant policies, procedures, and legislation

Identify Relevant Values
- Organizational
- Professional
- Patient/client and family (as defined by the patient/client)
- Social
- Cultural

Act
- Selection of preferred option
- Next steps or action plan
- Communication plan
- Documentation

Options
- Possible actions
- Values reflected in each possible action
- Alignment between values in each action and relevant values identified in the situation as a whole

Evaluate
- Requestor/participant evaluation
- Tracking trends in requests
- Debrief
- Follow up if appropriate

WORKING THROUGH AN ETHICS ISSUE
(DETAILED VERSION)

These questions are designed to help you proceed systematically, but need not be answered in order. The answers might shift as the discussion progresses.

- **Exploration**
  - What is the issue that needs to be addressed?

  - What are the relevant facts?

  - How significant are the possible harms of the existing situation?

  - What are your expectations or goals?

  - What makes this an ethical issue from your perspective?

  - What is your gut reaction or intuition regarding this situation?

  - Which relationships are central to this issue?

  - Identify major stakeholders, their values, and their expectations and goals (see optional table below)

Stakeholder	What do they value most?	Their expectations and goals

- Who needs to participate in making the decision?

- Who is accountable for making the decision?

- Are there legal or other constraints?

- Are there relevant policies, procedures, or legislation?

- Is there any relevant literature on cases like this?

- **Identify Relevant Values and Principles**
  - What are the main values/principles at stake in this question?
    - Consider organizational, professional, patient/client, family, social, cultural, religious, and spiritual values as well as common ethical principles (see list above).

- **Options (see below for optional table)**
  - What are possible approaches to address this issue?

  - Which values/principles are reflected in each possible approach?

  - How does each approach align with the relevant values/principles identified previously?

<u>Table - Possible Actions</u>
(This table is not intended to prescribe the number of possible approaches).

Approach #1	Approach #2	Approach #3	Approach #4	Approach #5
Description: **Change nothing/ maintain status quo**	Description:	Description:	Description:	Description:
Values and/or principles aligned with approach:	Values and/or principles aligned:	Values and/or principles aligned:	Values and/or principles aligned:	Values and/or principles aligned:
Values and/or principles in tension with approach:	Values and/or principles in tension:	Values and/or principles in tension:	Values and/or principles in tension:	Values and/or principles in tension:
Alignment with values relevant to situation:	Alignment with relevant values:	Alignment with relevant values:	Alignment with relevant values:	Alignment with relevant values:

- **Act**
    - Which of these options best reflects a balance of values/principles identified as being relevant to the issue?

    - Why is this the best approach possible in this situation? Would you be comfortable with explaining this to someone not involved in the discussion, such as a member of the public, patient, family member, or colleague?

    - Can all involved in use of the tool 'live with' the recommendation?

- o What are the next steps (the action plan) going forward?

- o Who needs to hear the recommendation(s)? Who will communicate the recommendation(s)?

- o What documentation needs to be produced? Who is responsible for producing and storing documentation?

- **Evaluate**
  - o How will this recommendation(s) be evaluated?

  - o Who is responsible for evaluating this recommendation(s)?

  - o Who is responsible for tracking themes and trends in ethics issues? Do they need to be informed?

  - o Is debriefing needed? Who will be involved in any debriefing?

  - o Is follow-up appropriate? Who will be responsible for ensuring follow-up occurs?