

Clinical ethics

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Locating clinical ethics

- All medical questions ultimately reduce to:
 - “What should I, as a clinician responsible for the care of this patient, do here?”
- Any question that can be reduced to an “ought” or a “should” form has an ethical dimension somewhere
- Ethical questions are different from empirical questions.

Empirical and ethical issues often co-exist

- P is a 9y old child, born 2010;
- 2012 haemolytic uraemic syndrome – renal failure, gut failure,
- 2013 renal transplant
- Cardiac arrest pre transplant - severe neurological damage – 4 limb cerebral palsy, severe dystonia, cortical blindness
- Significant ongoing co-morbidity, including respiratory failure requiring ventilation on occasion – 16 days at home over last 7 years; transplant failing
- Medical team feel renal replacement therapy, elective surgery except emergency palliative surgery, CPR, invasive ventilation, inotropes and ECMO no longer justified.
- Family disagree ...

Growing issue

- The issue of how value judgements should be made is growing in importance
- In the past doctors tended to decide – this is changing

Clinical Ethics Advisory Group (CEAG)

- CEAG addresses the ethical question – it is not mediation
- **CEAG does not decide** – it can help to illuminate, challenge and sometimes facilitate value judgements
- CEAG is available to all staff
- It is part of the clinical governance structure reporting to the Clinical Effectiveness and Outcomes Committee

CEAG referral form questions

1. List the relevant clinical conditions
2. What are the clinical conditions that brought you to the point of believing you are faced with an ethical dilemma
3. What is the ethical dilemma facing the clinicians?
4. What is the patient's view of the dilemma?
5. Have you discussed this with the patient's family (or significant others)?
6. What efforts have been made to clarify and resolve the difficulties?
7. Does the patient have mental health problems that may be amenable to expert treatment? And, if relevant, have you fully addressed this aspect?
8. If the dilemma entails 2 or more courses of action, what are the harms and benefits of each course of action.
9. What do you hope to achieve in this meeting with CEAG? (What is the goal of the analysis?)
10. What are the key **ethical** questions that you would like CEAG to discuss?
11. What does the law / professional guidance say about each of these questions?

Process

- Urgent
 - Contact Stephen Louw, Akif Gani or Legal Services
- Less urgent
 - Referral form (+ feedback form)
 - Set out issues
- Help from members of CEAG
 - Paediatricians on CEAG:
 - Helen Aspey
 - Vincent Tse
 - Chris O'Brien
- Meeting
 - bring the team – issue around parental / patient involvement
 - Address patient / parental expectations
 - Minutes – no decision