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Fundamental Ethical Principles

The following ethical principles provide a generalized framework within which ethical situations and dilemmas may be analyzed.

- **The Principle of Autonomy**

An obligation to respect the autonomy of other persons, which is to respect the decisions made by other people concerning their own lives. Also called the principle of human dignity.

Corollary principle: Respecting the right of patients to make decisions about their own healthcare.

- **The Principle of Beneficence**

An obligation to bring about good in all actions.

Corollary principle: Providing care that is in the best interest of the patient and actively promotes health and well-being.

- **The Principle of Nonmaleficence**

An obligation not to harm others.

Corollary principle: Minimize any potential harm to a patient when harm cannot be avoided.

- **The Principle of Justice**

An obligation to provide others with whatever they are owed or deserve.

Corollary principle: Treating all patients equally, fairly, and impartially.

- **The Principle of Fidelity**

An obligation to be loyalty.

Corollary principle: Treating all patients with loyalty, fairness, truthfulness, advocacy, and dedication and keeping promises.

Ethical Decision-Making Model

Step 1: Identify the problem.

- Does a problem or dilemma actually exist?
- Is this an ethical, legal, moral, professional, or clinical problem?
- Is it a combination of more than one of these?
- How can you know the nature of the problem?
- Would you consult at this early stage as you are identifying the problem?
- How might you begin the process of consultation with your client about the nature of the problem?

Step 2: Identify the potential issues involved.

- How might you best evaluate the rights, responsibilities, and welfare of all those involved and those who are affected by the decision, including your own welfare as a practitioner?
- How can you best promote your client's independence and self-determination?
- What actions have the least chance of bringing harm to your client?
- What decision will best safeguard the client's welfare?
- How can you create a trusting and collaborative climate where your clients can find their own answers?
- What principles can you use in prioritizing the potential issues involved in this situation?
- Are there any ways to encourage the client to participate in identifying and determining potential ethical issues?

Step 3: Review relevant ethical guidelines.

- What guidance can you find on the specific problem under review by consulting with the professional codes?
- Are your values in agreement with the specific ethical code in question?
- How clear and specific are the codes on the specific area under consideration?
- Are the codes consistent with applicable state laws?

Step 4: Know relevant laws and regulations.

- Are there any laws or regulations that have a bearing on the situation under consideration?
- What are the specific and relevant state and federal laws that apply to the ethical dilemma?
- What are the rules, regulations, and policies of the agency or institution where you work?

Step 5: Obtain Consultation.

- Do you know where to go to obtain consultation with professionals who are knowledgeable about ethical issues?
- Assuming that you will consult with a colleague or a supervisor, what would you expect from this consultation?
- What kinds of questions do you want to ask of those with whom you consult?
- With whom do you seek consultation? Do you consult only with those who share your orientation, or do you look for consultants with different perspectives?

- How can you use the consultation process as an opportunity to test the justification of a course of action you are inclined to take?
- What kinds of information do you document when you consult?
- When you do make use of a consultation process, do you inform your client about this? Are there any ways you might include the client in this consultation process?

Step 6: Consider possible and probable courses of action.

- What are some ways that you can brainstorm many possible courses of action?
- Do you have a systematic method for analyzing ethical obligations and possible courses of action?
- Are you willing to involve your client in the discussion of the various courses of action?
- What might you document pertaining to discussions with your client about probable courses of action?

Step 7: List the consequences of the probable courses of action.

- How can you best evaluate the potential consequences of each course of action, before implementing a particular action plan?
- Are you willing to involve your client in the discussion of the implications of each course of action for the client?
- What ethical principles can you use as a framework for evaluating the consequences of a given course of action?
- Examine the consequences of various decisions for your client, for you as counselor, and for the profession in general.

Step 8: Decide on what appears to be the best course of action.

- After carefully considering all the information you have gathered, how do you know what seems to be the best action to take?
- Do you solicit the input of your client in making this decision at this phase?
- Once you have formulated a plan of action, do you ask for feedback from a colleague or supervisor?
- Once the course of action has been implemented, what are some ways that you might evaluate the course of action?
- Are you willing to follow up to determine the outcomes and see if further action is necessary?

¹Adapted from Corey, G., Corey, M, & Haynes, R. (1998). Student workbook for Ethics in Action. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

The Realm-Individual Process-Situation (RIPS) Model of Ethical Decision Making

The following is an excerpt from *Ethical Decision Making to Avoid Disciplinary Action*, Originally published in Volume 22, Number 1 of the *Federation Forum Magazine* which was written from an educational session presented by Annette Iglarsh and Nancy Kirsch at the 2006 FSBPT Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon.

Using the RIPS Model

There are many ethical decision-making tools but they really do not apply to the types of dilemmas physical therapists confront. The RIPS model has been adapted for physical therapists and is the result of a lot of work by Rushworth M. Kidder, who wrote the book, *How Good People Make Tough Choices*. It was developed by L. Dolly Swisher and the Ethics and Judicial Committee of the APTA.

RIPS Framework

Realms	Individual Process	Situation
Individual	Moral sensitivity Moral judgment	Issue/Problem Dilemma
Organizational/Institutional	Moral motivation Moral courage	Distress Temptation
Societal		Silence

Is there is an ethical issue? Some things make you feel uncomfortable. This is the hardest part; accurately defining the problem, why we are concerned about the situation and what it is that is making us feel uncomfortable. Can you identify the ethical principles? Are they conflicting ethical principles? Is there a problem or distress or a dilemma?

Why is it a problem?

- **Professional:** Does it conflict with professional values?
- **Personal:** Does it conflict with personal values?
- **Economic:** Is there a financial problem that may evolve? Are there going to be financial difficulties for you if you leave a particular situation?
- **Intellectual:** Is it something you cannot understand or you cannot justify from a purely intellectual point of view?
- **Societal:** Is this going to have an overall impact on society?

Which ethical principles are involved?

- **Autonomy:** patients have the right to make some decisions as well as we do.
- **Beneficence:** care in the best interest of the patient
- **Non maleficence:** “do no harm”
- **Justice:** equity or fair treatment
- **Veracity:** truthfulness

What type of an ethical situation is it? Is it an issue, distress or a dilemma?

Test for Right versus Wrong¹

1. **Legal test:** Is it legal? Know your practice act and rules and regulations.
2. **“PU” test:** Does it feel or “smell” wrong?
3. **Front page test:** How would it look on the front page of the newspaper?
4. **Mom/Dad Test:** How would your parents feel if they knew what you were doing?
5. **The professional ethics test:** What do the Code of Ethics, Standards of Ethical Conduct say?

What course of action are you going to take? Use your moral imagination. Is there another way to do it other than the obvious ways? Is the course of action consistent with ethical principles, with the Code of Ethics, with your practice act and rules and regulations?

What will happen when you take this course of action? Analyze the course of action. Are there any barriers to implementation from your institution or does the action require moral courage to implement?

After the action has been taken, were there any unexpected results, any collateral damages or anything that you may not have expected? Is there any further action required? What did you or anybody else involved learn from the process? Do any organizational structures or policies require revision?

¹Adapted from Kidder's four point test.