

## Ethics in Action

Adapted from an idea submitted by Dianna Anderson at the 2001 Fall Professional Development Conference “Brain Dump”

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### OBJECTIVES/RATIONALE

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Health care workers must understand ethical and legal responsibilities, limitations, and the implications of each action taken in order to comply with established standards. The student is expected to identify ethical dilemmas and evaluate situations related to client autonomy.

TEKS 121.4 (c) 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, 7E, 7F

TAKS ELA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6  
Social Studies 1, 3, 4, 5

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### KEY POINTS

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- I. Ethics – refers to standards of conduct, standards that indicate how one should behave based on moral duties and virtues, which themselves are derived from principles of right and wrong.
  - A. Aspects of ethics
    - 1. the ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and propriety from impropriety
    - 2. involves the commitment to do what is right, good and proper
  - B. Morals – beliefs, customs, and traditions that are reflected in personal convictions about right and wrong.
    - 1. Moral duty – refers to the obligation to act or refrain from acting according to moral principles.
    - 2. Moral virtue – characteristics or conduct worthy of praise or admiration because they advance moral principal
  - C. values – core beliefs or desires that guide or motivate attitudes and actions
    - 1. Ethical values – directly relate to beliefs concerning what is right and proper
    - 2. Nonethical values
    - 3. Conflicting values
    - 4. contradictory values
    - 5. personal moral values
- II. Ethical Decisions
  - A. Process of ethical decision making
    - 1. perceive and eliminate unethical options
    - 2. select the best ethical alternative
    - 3. more than a belief in the importance of ethics is required – sensitivity to perceive the ethical implications of decisions, the ability to evaluate complex, ambiguous and incomplete facts and the skill to implement ethical decisions without unduly jeopardizing a career.
  - B. Ethical Commitment – a strong desire to do the right thing
  - C. Ethical Consciousness

- D. Ethical Competency
  - 1. Evaluation – the ability to collect and evaluate relevant facts and to know when to stop and how to make prudent decisions based on incomplete and ambiguous information
  - 2. Creativity – the capacity to develop alternative means of accomplishing goals in ways which avoid or minimize ethical problems
  - 3. Prediction – the ability to foresee potential consequences of conduct and assess the likelihood or risk that people will be helped or harmed by an act
- III. Models of Ethical Decision Making
  - A. The Golden Rule – the most basic and useful ethical theory – sometimes called the “Rule of Reciprocity”
    - 1. Confucius (500 B.C.E.) “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”
    - 2. Aristotle (325 B.C.E.) “We should behave to others as we wish others to behave to us.”
    - 3. from the Mahabharata (200 B.C.E.) “Do nothing to thy neighbor which thou wouldst not have him do to thee thereafter.”
    - 4. Jesus (30 C.E.) “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”
  - B. Kant’s Categorical Imperatives: Absolute Moral Duties Based on Principle
    - 1. No exceptions, no excuses – moral obligations are absolute, invariable and do not allow for exceptions or extenuating circumstances
    - 2. Derivative Rules
      - a) Rule of Universality – behave only in those ways you feel appropriate for all people, at all times.
      - b) Rule of Respect – All individuals are intrinsically important and the well-being of each is a moral end in itself; never treat others as simply the means for your own gain or gratification.
  - C. Consequentialism / Utilitarianism – based on the notion that the ethical merit of an act is best determined by the consequences produced.
    - 1. Principle of Utility – actions are right and good when they produce benefit, pleasure or happiness or prevent harm, pain or unhappiness
      - a) Act Utilitarianism – The ethical merit of an act is judged in terms of the immediate and direct consequences of the action
      - b) Rule Utilitarianism – The ethical merit of an act is judged in terms of what the consequences of the action would be if such conduct became the general rule and everyone acted accordingly
    - 2. Greatest Good For the Greatest Number
    - 3. Problems with Consequentialism – the ease with which it can be manipulated by self-serving rationalizations to produce situational ethics and an end-justifies-the-means credo that elevates expediency over principle
  - D. The Josephson Institute Ethical Decision-Making Model
    - 1. All decisions must take into account and reflect a concern for the interests and well being of all stakeholders.

2. Ethical values and principles always take precedence over nonethical ones.
3. It is ethically proper to violate an ethical principle only when it is clearly necessary to advance another true ethical principle, which, according to the decision maker's conscience, will produce the greatest balance of good in the long run.

IV. Five Steps of Principled Reasoning

- A. Clarify – determine precisely what must be decided
- B. Evaluate – distinguish solid facts from beliefs, desires, theories, suppositions, unsupported conclusions and opinions that might generate rationalizations.
- C. Decide – after evaluating the information available, make a judgment about what is or is not true and about what consequences are most likely to occur.
- D. Implement – once a decision is made about what to do, develop a plan of how to implement the decision in a way that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the costs and risks.
- E. Monitor and Modify – monitor the effects of decisions and be prepared and willing to revise a plan, or take a different course of action, based on new information.

***Teacher Note:***

This lesson can be done in a format of class work once a week for 1-2 months, or as a single unit over a couple of weeks. Students will select topics in medical ethics to research, write an article and provide medical illustrations. This will then be produced using magazine format. The magazine will also include reviews of TV shows, movies, books, and other articles.

In advance of the class, the instructor should monitor and tape re-runs of ER and other shows that depict a medical ethical dilemma. Also a list of movies that deal with ethical issues can be provided and the students can view them and write reviews. (Examples: “The Doctor”, “Awakenings”, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest”, and “Lorenzo’s Oil”)

**Suggested topics in ethics:**

Cloning	Liability, malpractice and Lawyers
Euthanasia	Patient Abuse
Stem Cell Research	Abortion
Organ Donation	Surrogate parenthood
Selection of Transplant Patients	Religion, Patient’s Rights and Technology
Patient Privacy and Rights	

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## ACTIVITIES

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I. Produce an Ethics Magazine

**Teacher Note:**

1. Divide the class into groups according to their interest. 2. Give them library time for research and set a deadline for an outline. 3. Set further deadlines for rough draft and final draft. 4. Format articles and magazines using various medical/nursing journals as samples/examples. 5. Have one of the artistic students design a cover for the magazine. 6. Decide on a name for the magazine. 7. All articles require an abstract.

II. After the magazine is complete, make a brief presentation (no more than 5 minutes) of ethical topic.

- a. State the issue
- b. Offer the dilemma (s) surrounding the issue (present both sides of the issue)
- c. After the 5-minute presentation, the class will briefly offer discussion and take a vote on how the class stands on the issue.
- d. The group will state their decision regarding the topic

III. Read “Horton Hatches an Egg” by Dr. Seuss or view the video. Discuss who should get custody of the baby bird, Horton or his biological mother.

IV. Respond to Ethical Dilemmas posted on the STARS Website.

<http://www.swmed.edu/stars>

V. Participate in a Biomedical Debate according to HOSA Biomedical Debate Guidelines.

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## MATERIALS NEEDED

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“Horton Hatches The Egg” book or video.

Topic for biomedical debate

HOSA Biomedical Debate Guidelines

<http://josephsoninstitute.org/MED/medtoc.htm>

<http://www.swmed.edu/stars>

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## ASSESSMENT

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Biomedical Debate Rating Sheet ([www.HOSA.org](http://www.HOSA.org))

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## ACCOMMODATIONS

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For reinforcement, the student will develop a brief description of the ethical dilemma using one of the topics in the Key Points Section.

For enrichment, the student will use a multimedia program to prepare and present a drama based on the highlights of the biomedical debate.

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## REFLECTIONS

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