

Ethical Dilemmas in Healthcare

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1. Introduction

- An ethical dilemma arises when two or more moral principles conflict and no choice is fully satisfactory.
- Healthcare frequently presents such situations involving life, autonomy, and resources.

2. Common Dilemmas

- Respecting patient autonomy when refusal of treatment may cause harm.
- Allocating scarce resources such as beds, organs, or medicines fairly.
- Balancing confidentiality against the duty to warn others of danger.

3. Sources of Conflict

- Differences between patient wishes and professional judgment.
- Cultural, religious, or family values that clash with clinical advice.

4. Approaches to Resolution

- Apply the four principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice.
- Use structured steps: gather facts, identify stakeholders, weigh options, and decide.
- Consult ethics committees and colleagues for guidance.

5. Role of the Professional

- Remain impartial, document reasoning, and communicate openly.
- Respect the patient's dignity throughout the process.

6. Summary

- Ethical dilemmas require careful, principled reasoning rather than personal opinion.
- Structured frameworks and consultation help reach defensible decisions.