

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 workers face these regularly when patient wishes, clinical judgment, and resources collide.

2. Core Ethical Principles

- **Autonomy:** respecting a patient's right to make their own decisions.
- **Beneficence and non-maleficence:** doing good while avoiding harm.
- **Justice:** distributing care and resources fairly among patients.

3. Common Dilemmas

- End-of-life decisions, such as withdrawing life support or honoring do-not-resuscitate orders.
- Conflicts between patient autonomy and family or provider preferences.
- Resource allocation when demand exceeds available staff, beds, or medicines.

4. Approaches to Resolution

- Gather facts, identify stakeholders, and clarify the competing values involved.
- Apply ethical frameworks and consult ethics committees for complex cases.
- Document reasoning transparently to support accountability.

5. Professional Considerations

- **Conscientious objection:** declining to participate in care that violates personal morals while ensuring patient access.
- Cultural and religious values may shape what each party sees as right.
- Sound dilemma resolution balances compassion, law, and professional standards.