

Comprehensive Study of Ethical Dilemmas in General Healthcare Practices

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is the healthcare sector, a caring industry that seeks to improve the health of individual patients but presents many ethical issues in different settings. This paper describes general practice ethical dilemmas arising from the healthcare setting regarding patient autonomy, privacy, palliation, informed consent, and rationing. Using case studies and literature and integrating both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the research questions aim to identify the causes of such ethical dilemmas and how to solve them. According to proof deduced from the study, HCS personnel report working in an environment that constantly presents ethical dilemmas; choices are made between/within professional responsibility, patients' rights, and compliance with institutional policies. This study underlines the necessity to define ethical principles for decision-making in the most ambiguous cases and develop extensive training courses for the healthcare staff. Solutions are noted to involve improving communication between other healthcare departments, improving patients' relationships with their care providers, and increasing healthcare policies' legal and moral standards.

Keywords: *Ethical dilemmas; healthcare practices; patient autonomy; informed consent; resource allocation; end-of-life care; confidentiality; healthcare ethics; medical decision-making; ethical frameworks.*

Introduction

By nature, healthcare is already an ethical field of work. It is upon the professionals within this field to make decisions that directly impact the health of individuals, children and families, groups or entire populations. The four principles of healthcare include: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. However, to say that such principles are unfailing in healthcare processes would be a deception because the practice involves diverse and constantly evolving ethically sensitive issues.

Ethical issues in health care are situations where different and even opposing ethical standards are encountered, such as the principle of maintaining a patient's rights and autonomy, which contradicts the principle of beneficence. These obligatory actions maximize the patient's benefit or the principle of justice with limited resources and when decisions must be made regarding who should be treated. These dilemmas are further discussed below and influenced by cultural, legal, and institutional contexts within distinct healthcare practices.

As a research problem, the general practice of an ethical transgression that is widespread in healthcare facilities worldwide will be the focus of this study. The overall objective of this study will, therefore, be to establish the causes of the general practice of ethical transgression in general healthcare practices by healthcare practitioners, gather empirical evidence on how the main ethical issues that may be of interest to the general public; and provide the findings that will help healthcare practitioners in avoiding pitfalls of this study hope that its identification and analysis of argued ethical issues in various healthcare settings will

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help review the current literature on ethics in healthcare and sensitize the readers on how such ethical issues can be dealt with.

Literature Review

Another area of health care is an extensive and composite area, which responds to questions and moral precepts referring to medicine. It is, therefore, the responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions that ultimately have some bearing on the patients' health. This literature relates the theoretical issues in healthcare ethics and the experiences of practitioners in employing received theories to actual situations. The most common ethical questions identified in the literature are as follows: patient self-determination, informed consent, patient's rights to privacy, and rational use and accessibility of resources. Against this background, these ethical principles are mostly provisional or contradictory, thus complicating the ethical decision-making process among healthcare workers.

Patient Autonomy and Informed Consent

Respect for the patient's rights is one of the principles of healthcare morals, based on the fact that each person has the right to decide on their own body and treatment. This principle decrees that patient should be allowed autonomy in making their treatment decisions so long as they have been made aware of the gains, losses and available choices. However, the concept of autonomy sometimes raises an ethical dilemma with other principles, such as the principle of beneficence- advocating for healthcare professionals to act in the patient's best interest. The ethical issue comes into play when the patient declines a treatment likely to save his/her life or when providers doubt whether a patient can make rational decisions.

According to Beauchamp and Childress (2019), the concept of informed consent is essential to the principle of respect for patient autonomy. To provide informed consent, a patient needs to comprehend the information given to him or her regarding the disease, his/her condition, or a treatment plan. This will address the possibility of loss and gain of proposed treatments and the possible outcomes of refusing the treatment. Though there are general requirements that guidelines specify how the required compliance with patients' informational needs is to be achieved, the implementation of the rules addressing such concerns may prove strikingly difficult in practice due to limited guarantees that patients are capable of processing the information being supplied to them due to their potentially stressful states or other conditions. However, there are limitations to informed consent, especially in multicultural populations and to patients' limited health literacy. However, some patients may lack the mental ability/ health to make decisions. This raises even more questions regarding the concept of autonomy – whether healthcare givers should make decisions on behalf of the patient.

A relevant ethical question regarding autonomy involves a patient who does not want to accept specific treatment that may help him or her to live or continue living. However, the principle of beneficence instructs healthcare givers to do what is in the patient's best interest, but this is an issue with the patient's autonomy. Suppose patients do not accept the treatment that can save their lives. In that case, the healthcare professionals have to consider whether the patient understands the consequences of refusal, whether he or she has the mental capacity to make that decision and whether the patient has any religious, cultural or personal reasons to reject the treatment. The healthcare provider exercises the ethical dilemma of patient self-determination, where one has to make decisions while upholding the patient's wishes and working for the patient's benefit.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality is another basic ethical practice that is honored by caregivers in the administration of their duties. Healthcare consumers disclose personal information of the self to healthcare givers. Thus, it is the moral obligation of the healthcare givers, as well as possible security breaches, to ensure that such information is not disclosed to third parties. This paper has established that the duty of confidentiality is central to developing trust and the patient-physician relationship. Nevertheless, confidentiality should sometimes be broken to protect the patient, people with him or her, or others at risk.

Gillon (2017) describes the controversies that emerge in contexts that could violate patient privacy. For instance, doctors are mandated to explain a patient's conditions to third parties such as men, law enforcement agents, or approved third parties where the patient is considered a danger to their own life or the lives of others due to mental health issues or communicable illnesses such as TB, or the COVID-19 virus. In such circumstances, a violation of the law of confidentiality may be required in order to save lives or avoid an act of destruction. Nonetheless, decisions to breach patients' privacy should be made wisely bearing in mind the outcomes this will have on the patient, the broader society, and the law.

In the mental health field, confidentiality becomes very difficult to uphold when the patient is a danger to himself or others. Many healthcare providers face challenges in decisions concerning honoring patient's privacy or reporting incidents that threaten safety. Sometimes, medical practitioners may be required to convey a patient's status to relatives, police, or any other relevant authorities, provided that the patient poses a threat to harm himself or others. This ethical issue lies between patients' privacy rights and their responsibility to avoid harm to the patient and the public. These are not trivial decisions but decisions that call for tact and an appropriate knowledge of the confidentiality allowed in the health profession.

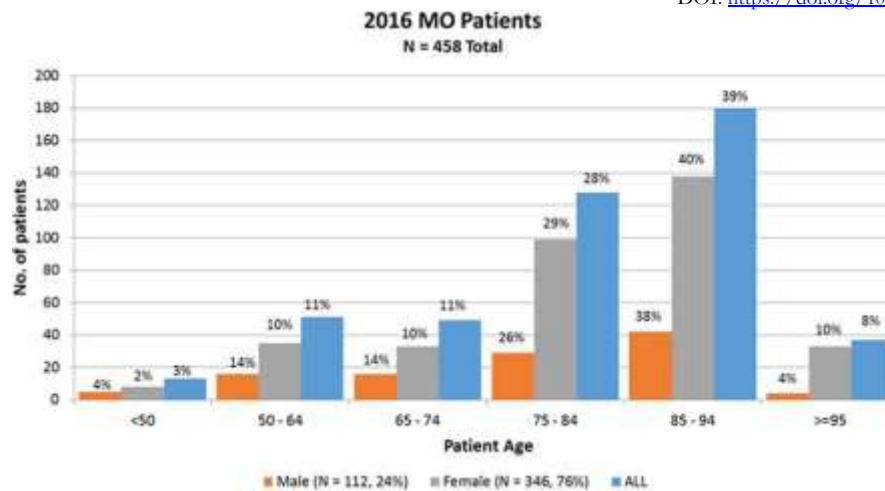
End-of-Life Care and Resource Allocation

Another field where ethical questions are raised is end-of-life treatment. The issues surrounding decisions to continue using life-sustaining measurements or the patient to palliative care are filled with ethical dilemmas. Therefore, patients, families, and healthcare providers have different perceptions about the meaning of quality life and the prescription of goals of care at the end of life. Ethical dilemmas occur when a patient loses the mental capacity to decide on their care needs, for example, when a patient is suffering from dementia or when the next of kin and the treating team disagree on the best course of action.

The case of ethical issues in end-of-life friction includes the ethical use of advance directives or living wills, where an individual can write down his or her wishes regarding end-of-life care. For that reason, there is usually some difficulty in implementing these directions where the patients and the immediate family or even other healthcare givers do not agree. As we seek to know what to do regarding whether to sustain or withdraw life-preserving measures, an ethical issue is whether the treatment being administered poses more harm than any potential benefit. These decisions are best made by understanding a patient's preferences and appreciating the family's feelings.

There are four distinct but interrelated ethical issues of concern in resource allocation within healthcare systems: the type of care provided at the end of life. Policies assuming control over such limited resources as ventilators, ICU beds and transplants bring out issues of fairness, justice and equity in the health sector. It is not uncommon in any healthcare setting for healthcare practitioners to make choices on behalf of patients about who should receive treatment when the endowment is scarce. In his article, Daniels (2019) explains the principle of justice in healthcare, and the author states that it is important to recognize that healthcare systems will need to make hard trade-offs about how resources should be distributed fairly and justly. This needs the assessment of criteria for patient allocation, including disease severity, prognosis, and response to the intended treatment.

This means that most decisions made concerning the allocation of resources tend to form challenges in fundamental moral principles like equity and beneficence. For instance, healthcare providers ask themselves several questions in organ transplants: To which patient should the organ be transplanted? Likewise, during a pandemic like COVID-19, healthcare organizations must determine how scarce resources should be distributed, e.g., intensive care unit beds or ventilators, to benefit the most patients of a given available population. Such decisions invariably present moral dilemmas regarding who should be in a position to do what, for whom, and whether those in need within society's various factions are adequately protected.



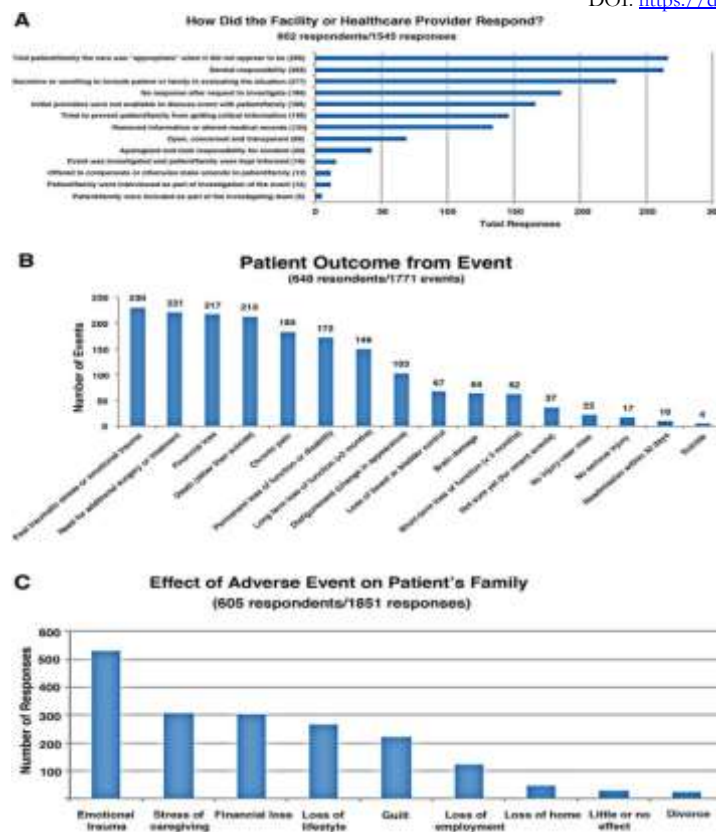
(Thibaud et al., 2018).

Healthcare Systems and Ethical Dilemmas

Constraints: decisions on healthcare priorities involve ethical decisions regarding the equitable allocation of available resources. As these healthcare systems develop and resources remain scarce, healthcare professionals face the challenges of rationing these foundational resources to get the most out of them with equal regard for the patient's rights.

Daniels (2019) provides an example of an ethical conundrum in resource allocation for health-seeking and emphasizes scarce resources within healthcare systems. Each person has a right to health care, although the distribution of healthcare resources is a primary challenge of justice inconsistency in everyday practice. Careful consideration must be made to questions about who is most important, who should work for equal treatment, and who should consider social needs above all of the individual. Moral concerns arise when a health care provider has to choose between one conflict of interest and another, between the sanctity of life & quality of life and the equitable allocation of resources.

Therefore, the main literature review of healthcare ethics expanded the understanding of ethical challenges in the practice of medical humane. Cargo et al. confirmed that major ethical values such as patient autonomy, informed consent, the principle of confidentiality, and allocation of resources are often inapplicable and, thus, likely to pose challenges to healthcare providers. More specifically, changes and advances affect principal patterns of health care, while the growing scarcity of resources and focus imposes stronger demands for ethical standards and guidelines. Solving these dilemmas involves considering one moral value against the other in conjunction with abiding to the fair, just and respecting patients' rights.



Bar graphs showing patient and family assessment of the impact (Stoll et al., 2020).

Methods

The data was therefore collected using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The qualitative part consists of interviews with doctors, nurses, hospital managers and leaders to get their experiences of the ethical challenges they experience at the workplace. Interviews mainly regard difficulties within a patient's self-governance, decision-making, consent, privacy, and right to die. Indeed, participants are required to write case reports of their personal experiences of ethical decision-making and implementation.

The quantitative aspect entails the administration of a questionnaire to a larger population of healthcare staff to estimate the frequency of various ethical issues and the determinants of decision-making. The survey gathers information about the respondents' demographic characteristics, the ethical decisions they face, and how the healthcare worker(s) handle them. Descriptive statistics, a frequency distribution analysis, and correlation analysis are used to analyze the data to determine the extent of ethical decision-making across the various facilities.

Results and Findings

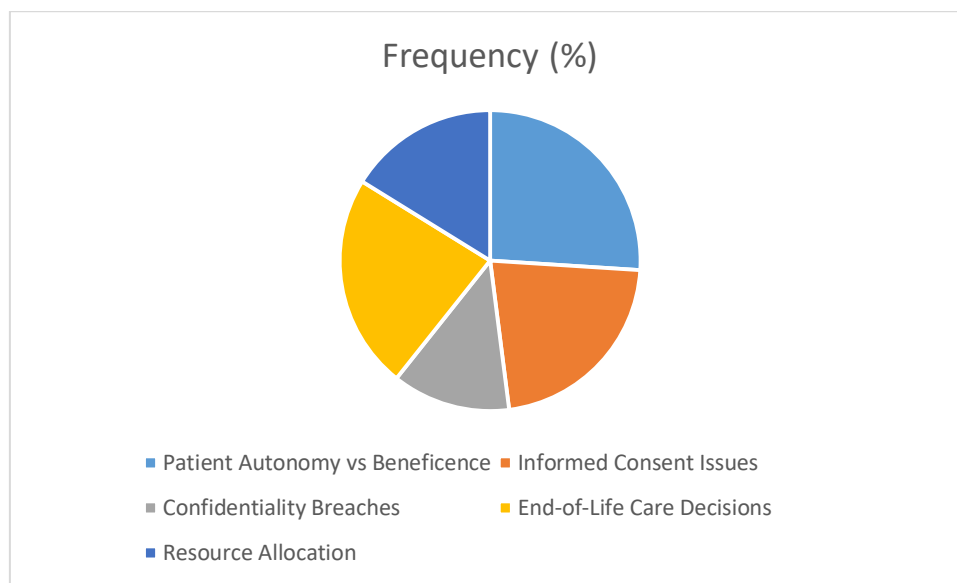
Healthcare Professionals' Experiences with Ethical Dilemmas

Table 1: Ethical Dilemmas Encountered by Healthcare Professionals

Ethical Dilemma	Frequency (%)
Patient Autonomy vs Beneficence	45
Informed Consent Issues	38
Confidentiality Breaches	22

End-of-Life Care Decisions	40
Resource Allocation	28

The study's findings included that the survey showed that the most common ethical issues in the relations between healthcare professionals and patients are about autonomy and beneficence; the main problem is related to patients' refusal of treatment. The second close is the issue of informed consent, where the respondents culturally, LSP recognize the challenge they have in explaining to the patients the exact procedures in case of an emergency.



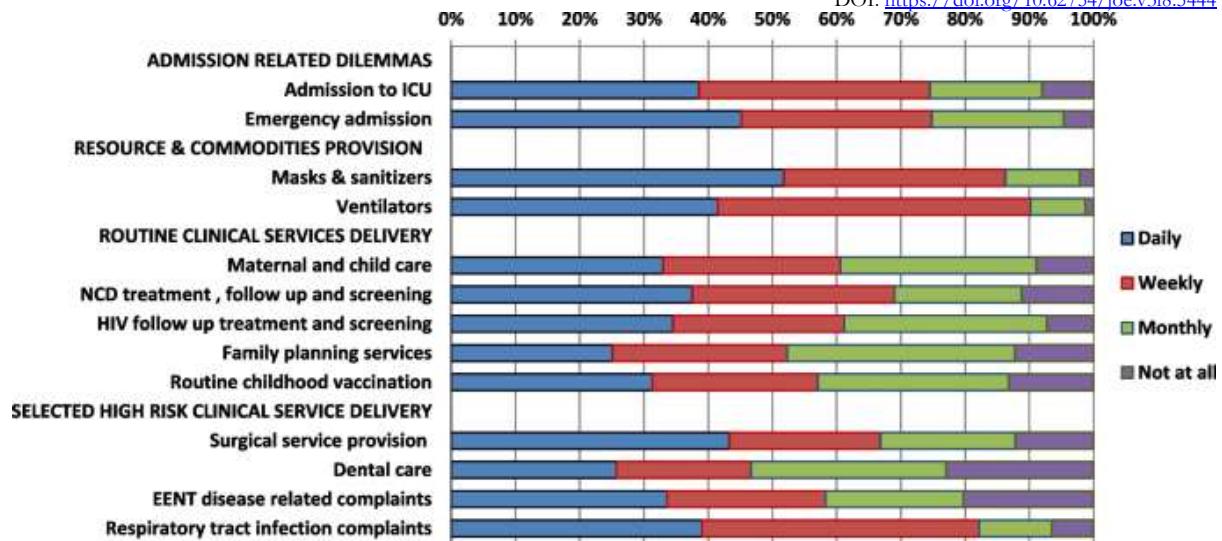
(Morley et al., 2020).

Case Studies and Qualitative Insights

In the qualitative interviews, participants described typical examples of ethical situations. One of them is when a patient rejects the administration of a treatment that can save his/her life for a reason that he/she has a right to do so, such as hostility toward a particular ethnicity; this raises the dilemma of whether to honor patient's autonomy or act in the patient's best interest. A relatively autonomous decision was made in another case when a nurse was unsure whether to share information about the patient's self-mutilation with her family, which would require violating patient confidentiality.

Healthcare Professionals' Strategies for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

Graph 1: Strategies Used by Healthcare Professionals to Address Ethical Dilemmas



Graph illustrating the various strategies employed by healthcare professionals in ethical decision-making, such as consulting ethics committees, discussing with peers, and involving patients/families in decision-making (Oerlemans et al., 2015).

The most common strategies employed by healthcare professionals in resolving ethical dilemmas included consulting with ethics committees (35%), engaging in discussions with colleagues (30%), and involving patients and their families in the decision-making process (25%).

Discussion

This study shows that ethical issues affecting the healthcare profession are multifaceted, and the healthcare workforce uses plenty of methodical approaches to handle these issues. The four principal ethical controversies include patient self-determination and the principle of beneficence, informed consent, and Medical Hippocratic Oath, patient privacy and resource rationality, which evidences the conflicts between patient's rights and their right to satisfactory treatment.

The Role of Ethical Frameworks

Deontology, a clinical ethical framework and utilitarianism are clinical ethical systems that aid decision-making procedures. However, these frameworks will not have clear solutions in any given situation. For this reason, healthcare workers use professional ethics, individual ethical support from other comrades in arms, and the presence of Institutional/enterprise ethical regulation.

Training and Education

The results presented in this paper also support the conclusion about the importance of adequate training in healthcare ethics. Since most healthcare institutions have ethics committees, the research implies that continuous ethical decision-making training could improve the accuracy of decisions and restore uncertainty (Anderson & Anderson 2018). Also, it may be noted that promoting ethics—a friendly culture that allows professionals in the context of healthcare to think through the implications of ethical reasoning and to engage in ethical language exchange can alleviate the emotional component of ethical decision-making.

Conclusions

Since ethical issues are fundamental and always observed in healthcare practice, healthcare personnel frequently work within this premise. This study has tried to focus on the significant disciplines that ethical dilemmas tend to arise from: patient autonomy, informed consent, confidentiality, and rationing of resources. Solving those dilemmas is system-dependent, and the range of measures includes the

development of strict ethical standards, appropriate staff training, and maintaining an ethical climate in the healthcare organization. When ethical knowledge is provided to the health care givers, the systems shall be capable of delivering professional and ethically sound health services that are caring without prejudice. Moreover, one may conclude that changing the focus on open communication and possibly developing professional and institutionally support disagreements in practice can contribute to achieving more comprehensible and less biased healthcare conditions and outcomes. All these ethical issues must be met to build and sustain trust, stay fair, and respect patients' dignity in different healthcare settings.

Recommendations

1. **Ethical Frameworks:** Strengthen and enhance the healthcare organizations' ethical decision-making policies and organizational culture of ethical practice to help healthcare personnel tackle ethical dilemmas.
2. **Education and Training:** To support healthcare workers' endeavors in ethical decision-making, there is a need to conduct training programs periodically to support the developmental needs of the center.
3. **Ethics Committees:** Expand the working capacities of ethics committees in a healthcare setting to be easily engaged in the multiple decision-making processes.
4. **Interdisciplinary Communication:** Encourage decision-making across care professions and disciplines that affirm ethical deliberation with patients and other important individuals in the patient's life.
5. **Resource Allocation Policies:** It is recommended that the outcomes of resource allocation decisions are fully communicated to be easily comprehensible and fair.

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