



Some basic bioethical principles

Autonomy: The right to make decisions about the course of our lives; often called “the right to self-determination.”

Beneficence: Doing good for others, including benefiting others and preventing harm.

Non-maleficence: “Do no harm;” an obligation not to harm others. If harm is unavoidable, make sure it is significantly outweighed by benefit.

Justice: Fairness; a duty to respect the rights of another; to obey morally acceptable laws; to distribute limited resources fairly.

An ethical dilemma occurs when there is a potential conflict between two or more of the above values as they are applied in a particular situation.



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Ethics Consult Services

Supporting informed choices
for patients of
University of Missouri Health Care





The University of Missouri Health Care's Ethics Consult Service is staffed by health care workers with specific training in the area of ethics. These professionals are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide quick consultations to patients, their families, surrogates or care providers who need assistance with making difficult treatment decisions.

When to call the Ethics Consult Service

Questions such as "What is the right thing to do?" are very real as technology plays an increasing role in medical care today. Dilemmas may arise when a patient, family member, health care professional or the hospital has different ideas about values, responsibilities and loyalties.

The Consultation Process

Following a request for consultation, a representative of the Ethics Consult Service will contact the individual requesting assistance. If further discussion is needed, a meeting will be set up with the patient and/or their family or representative(s). The health care provider(s) involved in the case also may attend.

During these private meetings, open and honest discussion is encouraged and the ethical issue or concern often is resolved. The ethics consultant may offer suggestions about the situation. However, the final decision is always left to the patient and his or her representatives with the support of the health care team.

Making informed decisions

University of Missouri Health Care believes in the rights of patients to make informed treatment decisions and provides a caring environment to support an informed choice.

What is the Ethics Committee?

The University of Missouri Health Care Ethics Committee consists of physicians, nurses, social workers, clergy, administrative staff, attorneys and community representatives. This committee provides group consultations, discussion, support and assistance to patients, families and care providers who are facing difficult ethical decisions.

To discuss any questions or concerns with an ethics consultant, ask your doctor, nurse, social worker or chaplain to call their representative at (573) 882-2738.

If the call is placed after 5 p.m., weekends or holidays, please dial the hospital switchboard at (573) 882-4141.

This is a volunteer service. There is no charge for this consultation.