



AVH Ethics Tool: A Guide for Addressing Ethical Issues

An ethical issue is any issue which represents:

- a conflict of values (organizational, personal, or professional) or ethical principles
- a violation of commonly accepted ethical principles (eg. autonomy)
- a violation of accepted organizational, personal or professional values
- a significant undue hardship or inappropriate harm to any stakeholder

Can I use this tool? Yes. This tool was developed for all AVH staff, physicians and volunteers.

When can I use it? Anytime you encounter an issue that you think might be an ethical issue. This tool will help you clarify the issue you are faced with and help identify possible courses of action.

What if I have questions about this tool or about the issue I am faced with? You may contact the Ethics Advisory Committee confidentially at any time. Contact information is at the top of each page.

OUR CORE VALUES

At Annapolis Valley Health, we believe in:

- **Integrity:** Our decisions and actions reflect our commitment to accepted ethical and professional conduct. We work to ensure that our conduct earns the support and trust of all segments of the public that we serve.
- **Accountability:** We make rational, informed decisions based on the needs of our communities and best available evidence. We are accountable for our actions and the effective, sustainable management of resources.
- **Respect:** We are committed to working in ways that promote dignity, fairness and respect.
- **Collaboration:** We work together with our communities and other partners to achieve improved services and healthier communities.
- **Continuous Improvement:** We are committed to quality and evaluation.
- **Innovation:** We seek opportunities to evaluate, change, grow, and improve by fostering learning, inquiry and discovery.

OUR EXPECTED BEHAVIOURS

Everyone in AVH is expected to:

- Treat each other with dignity, fairness and respect;
- Communicate in an open, honest and respectful way;
- Avoid using any kind of abuse, harassment, aggression or violence;
- Be responsible for our actions and behaviours; and
- Respect and support each person or group's human rights.

We as the staff, doctors, volunteers and student of AVH will:

- Come to work ready to do our job or volunteer service;
- Keep all personal information about patients, clients and health care team members private;
- Act safely;
- Follow all AVH policies, procedures and guidelines; and
- Support our AVH values.

PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS IN HEALTHCARE ETHICS

Delivery of health services is a continual process of balancing values, principles and interests in the allocation and delivery of health services. Commonly, principles or values come into conflict and must be reflected upon to help you decide how to proceed. Below are some of the important principles and concepts in healthcare ethics. These, in addition to the Core Values and Expected Behaviours unique to AVH listed on the previous page, are important to consider as you address your issue.

- **Beneficence:** to “do good”. This requires that providers perform acts that will benefit clients. Good care requires that the provider understands the client from a holistic perspective that respects the client’s beliefs, feelings, wishes and values, as well as those of the client’s family or significant others. Beneficence involves acting in ways that demonstrate caring, listening, supporting and nurturing.
- **Best Interests:** to consider the benefits and risks for stakeholders of a proposed course of action from the following perspectives: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.
- **Confidentiality:** the obligation to keep patient and organizational information confidential. Professional standards and privacy legislation provide guidance on the conditions under which health information can be ethically and legally disclosed.
- **Fidelity:** faithfulness to the relationship and/or to your role. The sacred trust related to this relationship. Persons must act in accordance with their respective roles.
- **Justice:** the obligation to be fair to all people, regardless of their race, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, medical diagnosis, social standing, economic level, and/or religious beliefs. There are several types of relevant justice considerations. Distributive justice calls on us to distribute benefits and burdens fairly on the basis of legitimate health needs and available resources. Formal justice requires that we treat individuals and groups of persons/patients the same unless there is a demonstrable *relevant* difference among them that justifies different treatment. Attention to social justice involves the identification and reflective consideration of the particular disadvantages and vulnerabilities of individuals and groups of persons who will be directly affected by health care decision making. Procedural justice asks us, among other things, to ensure that participants from all the relevant stakeholder groups are engaged in a defensible, accountable and transparent decision making process.
- **Non-Maleficence:** protection from harm. This requires that providers do not harm their client, even if they cannot protect themselves. Hazards in the workplace may put the client at risk. Staff are expected to identify such risks and act to prevent harm.
- **Paternalism:** the practice of controlling, monitoring or deciding what is good for an individual rather than letting him choose for himself (the opposite of autonomy). This includes restricting someone’s freedom to act to prevent him from harming himself (eg. Use of restraints, suicide prevention) and restricting someone’s autonomy. Paternalism is rarely justifiable with a mentally competent adult client.
- **Quality of life:** the principle that mere biological existence does not in itself have value; rather that life gives rise to activities and experiences which provide pleasure, satisfaction and well-being. The person whose life is in question is the only reliable judge of that life’s quality.
- **Respect for Autonomy:** the right to self-determination, independence and freedom. It involves the provider’s willingness to provide information to the client so that they may make informed decisions and subsequently respect a client’s right to choose what is right for him or herself, even if the provider does not agree with the client’s decision. Informed consent is an example of how this principle is applied.

- **Veracity:** being truthful or not intentionally misleading or deceiving clients. Based on mutual trust and respect for human dignity, this would require open and honest communication in a way that helps clients deal with the anxiety this knowledge may create. Concealing or guarding clients from the truth to “protect” them is rarely ethically justifiable.

A GUIDE TO CLARIFY AND ADDRESS THE ISSUE...

1. Identify your biases and intuitions. What are your gut feelings about the case? What are the sources of your intuitions (e.g. your moral training, professional norms, personal history, social position, religious beliefs, relationships with the people involved, etc.)? What is your role in this case? What are your expectations and goals as they pertain to this case?
2. Clarify the question. What is the issue that needs to be addressed? What are the values at issue (from page 2)?
3. Who needs to be a part of the decision? Who is accountable for making the decision?
4. Identify major stakeholders (client, family member, caregiver, health professional, etc.) and their expectations, values and goals. This ought to be discovered in conversation with these stakeholders.

Stakeholder	Their expectations/values	Their goals

5. What are the relevant (known) facts? This includes reference to the contributing policies, values, feelings, beliefs, legislation, evidence (sometimes these are in conflict).
6. How significant are the possible harmful consequences of the existing situation? List the possible harms. Important to clarify the context and define the immediacy of the situation.

7. What are the possible approaches to address this issue? You are not limited to exploring only three possible alternatives and remember that doing nothing is an option and needs to be explored as well.

Possible Alternative #1	Possible Alternative #2	Possible Alternative #3
Possible Alternative: Do nothing	Possible Alternative:	Possible Alternative:
Which values/principles are aligned with this alternative?	Which values/principles are aligned with this alternative?	Which values/principles are aligned with this alternative?
Which values/principles are in conflict with this alternative?	Which values/principles are in conflict with this alternative?	Which values/principles are in conflict with this alternative?

Upon ethical analysis, the best possible alternative is #_____.

8. Why is this the best approach? When you say it out loud, does it sound reasonable? Can you live with it?
9. Describe your plan for action and communication. Who needs to hear the decisions? Who will communicate it?
10. How will this decision be evaluated?
11. How confident are you that you have made a good decision?

✓	Confidence Level in having reached a good decision
	Extremely Confident: Do not need to revise your decision. Have reached consensus with stakeholders. It sounds reasonable when you say it out loud. All are in agreement and would readily be the messenger of the decision.
	Very Confident: Should not need to revise your decision. Have reached a decision stakeholders can agree to. It stands the test of publicity and is the best decision, given the circumstances.
	Somewhat Confident: Might need to revise your decision. Some discomfort remains with stakeholders. Some discomfort when you state the decision publicly (when you say it out loud it doesn't seem reasonable). Continue to work through or consult with the AVH Ethics Advisory Committee.
	Not very confident: Should revise your decision. Discomfort expressed by stakeholders. Doesn't sound reasonable when you say it out loud. Consult with the AVH Ethics Advisory Committee.
	Not at all Confident: Cannot achieve agreement on the best course of action. Revisit the evidence, policies, clarify values, consult with the AVH Ethics Advisory Committee. Seek to revise your decision.