



“Acting morally is behaving as if *everything we do matters.*”

Gloria Steinham

NSHEN Annual Conference

March 25 & 26, 2009

Join us at the Old Orchard Inn in Wolfville, NS for the preconference, conference or both! The preconference is open to people who are or may become involved in clinical ethics consultation (eg., Ethics Committee Members). The conference is designed for persons in the health care system and welcomes special guest speaker Rosalie Starzomski.

For additional information and to download the registration package please visit:
www.nshen.ca

Registration deadline is March 1, 2009



Walking the Talk Ethics & Everyday Practice

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Walking the Talk: Budgets as Ethical Documents

At some point, I heard the claim that the clearest statement of an organization’s ethical values is its budget. I believe that it’s true – actions do speak louder than words. Thus the budget is where the reality of a commitment to a particular set of values is seen. Values are beliefs about what is important which cannot be judged to be true or false by reference to empirical facts or evidence. Values have many sources, including religion, culture, and social groups, and they can differ significantly between individuals and between organizations. Given these differences, determining which values will prevail involves a process of dialogue and negotiation.

This process of prioritizing values is an inherent part of the budgeting process, but it’s not just budgets that are ethical documents. Budgets, business plans, and strategic plans all reflect the values of the organization. It’s therefore important to understand and to be able to communicate the ways in which particular actions are connected with particular organizational values.

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“Be a cheerleader for ethical champions.”

Price Pritchett

“Your first ethical obligation is to be good at what you do.”

Michael Rion

This isn't to say that there's only one way to translate a particular value into a particular action or decision, but there should be a direct connection. For example, an organization can value patient-centered care, but this value could be reflected by an investment in more nursing care, an investment in diagnostic equipment and technology, and/or by ensuring the availability of cultural health interpretation services.

The key question to ask is, “How is this decision consistent with our vision/mission/organizational priorities?” Organizational values should be used as a touchstone to guide the process of decision-making. In cases where fiscal values such as cost-effectiveness carry the day, that choice reflects values regarding the priority of using public funds efficiently in health care. Standing back and getting a sense of the big picture created by such decisions often will help to give a clear image of the values that are prevailing in an organization overall. It's important during the planning process to keep in mind the values that aren't being prioritized and the human costs of saving money as well as to ensure that no one group is bearing more than their share of the burden of limited resources. It's hard to keep a range of values in mind when fiscal constraints are omnipresent, but to quote Jon Stewart, “if you don't stick to your values when they're being tested, they're not values, they're hobbies.” *Marika Warren*

NSHEN: Who we are

NSHEN is Nova Scotia's health ethics network. We provide comprehensive ethics support to the province's district health authorities and the Department of Health. NSHEN operates as an innovative, dynamic collaboration of Nova Scotia's ten district health authorities, government (Department of Health) and academia (Dalhousie University).

With its aim of building capacity for ethical practice, the Nova Scotia Health Ethics Network focuses its work on four different, yet inter-related, aspects of ethics support:

- Ethics Education
- Health Policy
- Clinical Ethics
- Organizational Ethics

Through each of these forms of support, NSHEN is committed to making connections, fostering relationships, and appropriately developing and using resources so that the ethics questions and concerns we encounter each day in practice are better identified and addressed.

Questions? Comments? Want to join the mail list?

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