

Additional Cases

These cases are provided as a resource for your further use and practice with the Ethics Discussion Guide as per the Duty to Provide Care and the Duty to Provide a Safe Work Environment

Case #1

A new strain of bird flu has been circulating in Asia. This strain is associated with a high mortality rate.

Cases of this flu have been identified in Nova Scotia in travelers who have just returned from China. These patients are currently in your hospital. It is not known if human-to-human transmission is occurring with this strain. The leadership team is struggling with questions of how to allocate limited supplies of N95 masks and other forms of personal protective equipment (PPE), while individual health care providers are discussing whether or not they will report for work at all or refuse to care for the flu patients, whether or not they receive PPE.

- Thinking about the “duty to care” and the “duty to provide a safe work environment”, what are the key considerations in this case? Please use the Ethics Discussion Guide, as needed, to assist with your deliberations.

Case #2

You work in the emergency room and are very sensitive to scents. Exposure to scented products causes you to experience headaches, nausea, and dizziness which interfere with your ability to do your job effectively. When you were hired you were assured that your organization has a scent-free policy in place but you discover that it is rarely enforced. You have raised this with your colleagues and for the most part they have stopped using scented products, but residents from a nearby continuing care facility are often patients in the ER and many of them come in smelling strongly of cologne or perfume.

- Thinking about the “duty to care” and the “duty to provide a safe work environment”, what are the key considerations in this case? Is there a tension between these two duties? Please use the Ethics Discussion Guide, as needed, to assist with your deliberations.

Case #3

[Adapted from: My Right to Refuse Unsafe Work: A guide to ONA members Ontario Nurses Association October 2010]

You are a nurse working in a psychiatric ward and you and your colleagues have sometimes been subject to abuse from patients in the past in one form or another. You have approached your employer with your concerns, but nothing further has been done to protect staff members' health and safety. Tonight you must care for a violent patient by yourself as you are short staffed and you fear that you may be injured. You have requested security to be present on the unit for the shift, but your manager has denied your request. Will you go to work? What if the patient's aggression is not the result of her illness – does that make a difference?

- Thinking about the “duty to care” and the “duty to provide a safe work environment”, what are the key considerations in this case? Is there a tension between these two duties? Please use the Ethics Discussion Guide, as needed, to assist with your deliberations.

Case #4

You are the spiritual care practitioner assigned to a medical unit; you are a relative newcomer to the service, still getting your bearings and trying to make connections with staff as well as patients and family members. It is unclear to you whether the social worker who has been part of this team for many years has taken a dislike to you personally or just spiritual care in general. She takes every opportunity to make snide remarks about "religion" and "religious types" and "pseudo-clinicians" whenever you are present. There is a particular patient who has requested your involvement, but whose case is also one in which the social worker has a key role. Anytime you try to voice an opinion about this patient's situation or care, she ridicules your comments or breaks in to override what you are saying, often in front of the patient and family. It is humiliating and uncomfortable. No one on the team seems to stand up to her. You don't want to let the patient and family down, but you notice you are wanting to avoid the patient's room, and this is upsetting to you. But you also don't want to get off on the wrong foot by complaining to the unit manager.

- Thinking about the “duty to care” and the “duty to provide a safe work environment”, what are the key considerations in this case? Is there a tension between these two duties? Please use the Ethics Discussion Guide, as needed, to assist with your deliberations.