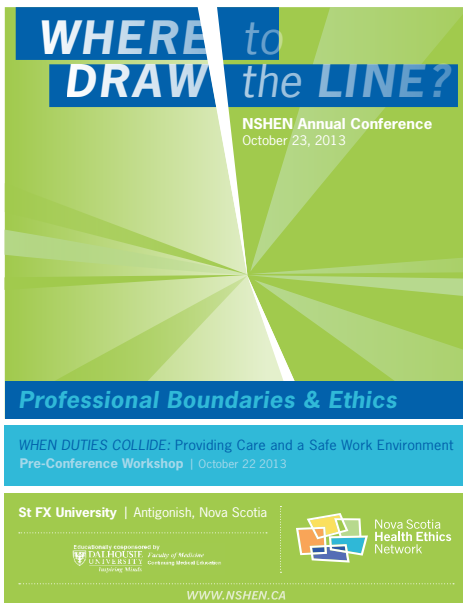




Establishing Boundaries on Shifting Ground

The annual NSHEN conference has just wrapped up, held this year in Antigonish at St. FX. Feedback from both presenters and attendees has been positive; everyone appreciated the high degree of participation and willingness to engage in discussion as well as the opportunity to talk about questions with no easy answers.



The preconference workshop focused on specific dilemmas that arise when duties to provide care come into tension with duties to provide a safe work environment. It was particularly valuable for NSHEN in furthering the development of a framework designed to address the tension between these two duties. The main conference explored professional boundaries, both highlighting their role in providing ethical care and discussing the difficulty, in many cases, of determining where boundaries should be drawn. Some of the aspects of the conference that participants identified as particularly valuable include:

- Who counts as “professional” when we’re talking about professional boundaries?
- Is it ever okay to accept gifts from or give gifts to patients or families?
- How (if at all) does social media affect professional boundaries?
- Are professional boundaries different across various practice contexts – e.g., in the hospital versus in the community versus in patients’/clients’ homes?

- How can professional boundary violations or crossings be reduced or prevented?
- Do patients or clients have responsibilities with regard to professional boundaries?
- What professional boundaries should be maintained with colleagues? With staff? With managers?
- What differences do small communities make to professional boundaries – how should professional boundaries be established and maintained with family and neighbours?

Several people suggested that discipline-specific breakout sessions would be useful, so we’ll look at the feasibility of such a format as we begin to plan for next year. Participants then participated in breakout sessions on professional boundaries and moral distress, professional boundaries and administrative work, professional boundaries in rural and remote communities, professional boundaries in ethics work, and professional boundaries in social media.

Some highlights identified in feedback surveys include

- The contributions of our presenters – Dr. Josephine Etowa, Dr. Fiona Bergin, Dr. Rick Singleton, Dr. Rosalie Starzomski, Karin Walsh, Dr. Cathy Simpson, and Dr. Christy Simpson
- The opportunity to reflect on ethics issues currently relevant to everyday practice
- The opportunity to participate in discussions and to benefit from others’ contributions
- Discussions that continued from sessions into breaks



- The opportunity to discuss subtleties, nuances, and “grey areas” relevant to ethics in practice
- The acknowledgement that there might not be a single “right” answer
- Discussions were practical and described tools or other means to help address ethics issues in practice

For the first time we invited DHAs to prepare posters as a means of sharing some of the leading practices that have been developed in Nova Scotia. AVH responded by sharing their new organizational ethics tool and we hope to see more such posters next year.

The only downside was that attendance was relatively low at approximately 60 participants. We know that there was significant interest in the topic, but we recognize that budget constraints affect whether or not people can attend, whether in terms of covering travel costs or arranging for time away from regular work responsibilities. We will be looking carefully in the next few months at whether there are other ways to achieve the broader objectives we have for every year’s conference, namely:

- Providing a forum for networking and sharing between people engaged in ethics work or interested in ethics from various professional and geographic positions
- Exposing Nova Scotians to some of the ethics work being done in other parts of the country
- Meeting ethics education needs for Nova Scotian health care providers
- Stimulating discussion about ethics issues in health care organizations around the province as attendees tell colleagues about their experiences

If you have any thoughts regarding other means of achieving these goals (such as producing online videos with visiting ethicists, hosting smaller workshops instead of one big conference, or establishing online forums) please do let us know. We are also aware that the smaller number of attendees this year might have contributed to greater opportunity for participation which was highly valued by those who attended, and we will take that into account as well.

In all, a very successful conference and we are looking forward to next year’s event in whatever form it takes!



NSHEN currently has a library of books that may be of interest to you.

Some titles based on the conference theme:

McGibbon EA & Etowa JB, (2009). *Anti-Racist Health Care Practice*. Canadian Scholars Press.

Gentile MC. (2012). *Giving Voice to Values*. Yale University Press.

Storch JL, Rodney P and Starzomski R. (2004). *Towards a Moral Horizon: Nursing ethics for leadership and practice*. Pearson Education Canada.

Please check our website for complete listing and contact the Administrator to arrange a book loan.

Questions? Comments? Want to join the mail list?

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Here are some interesting readings on ethics and professional boundaries in the media recently:

What's not being shared in shared decision-making.
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hast.188/abstract>

When doctors share with their patients.
http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/12/when-doctors-share-with-their-patients/?_r=0

Googling a patient. Should health care professionals "google" their patients?
<http://www.thehastingscenter.org/Publications/HCR/Detail.aspx?id=6537>

Physician, Patient, Parent: Where exactly is the line?
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hast.83/abstract>

NSHEN: Upcoming Events...

December 2013 The NSHEN December newsletter will feature an article based on the Rasouli decision made in the fall. Please refer to our May 2013 newsletter for the background on this end of life case.

March 2-8, 2014 The Canadian Bioethics Society, in collaboration with NSHEN, will present the first ever National Health Ethics Week. The theme for this event is From Coast to Coast to Coast. Materials are being produced to help health care organizations and other groups across the country plan and host events connected to this theme. More information will be available in the next few weeks.

April 2014 CEC Follow-up Workshop. For individuals who participated in the beginner CEC workshop this past year. This event will be in Truro, NS. Registration will open soon.

What Makes NSHEN Unique?

While there are other ethics networks and centres across the country, there are a few features that make NSHEN unique within Canada.

- * Our collaborative structure facilitates dialogue between partners
- * Our strategic goals are collectively established by the collaborating partners
- * NSHEN involves academia, government, and health care organizations in a single network

This results in a network that is innovative, efficient, and responsive to ethics needs in Nova Scotia.