

2020

Ethics Day Planning Guide



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What is an ethics day?

An ethics day can serve several different purposes, but in general it's an opportunity to focus on and engage with the ethical questions that arise in health care settings.

Determine the objectives – 5 months ahead

Decide what you hope to achieve by presenting an ethics day. Some of the objectives of an ethics day might be:

- Increase the capacity and confidence of those providing ethics support (zone ethics committee and local ethics team members)
- Increase the capacity and confidence of individuals working within the health care system
- Provide opportunity for discussion of frequently experienced ethical challenges
- Provide opportunity for discussion of a particular, challenging case
- Increase or sustain awareness of ethics supports in NSHA
- Highlight and publicize the ethics work that is being done throughout the Nova Scotia Health Authority.
- Increase awareness and understanding about particular ethical issues within the health care organization (e.g., new policy around medical assistance in dying (MAiD)).
- Increase public awareness or understanding about particular ethical issues

Decide the format – 5 months ahead

Ethics days can take various forms, depending on the objectives. Some options might include:

- A series of tailored presentations given to small groups or teams about a topic
- Repeated presentation of a session that's open to everyone at different times throughout the day
- Whole day workshop
- Half day workshop
- Public presentation

Pick the topic(s) – 4 months ahead

See the attached list of possible topics if you need inspiration. In some instances multiple topics are explored in a day, often using a particular case to link them, and other times the day is devoted to exploring various aspects of one particular topic. Both approaches can be effective.

Topics can also be chosen in consultation with the presenter(s), but ethics days seem to be most successful when the topic is relevant to the local audience, so generating a short list of potential topics for the presenter is beneficial.

Decide on a tentative agenda for the day – 4 months ahead

It's often effective to have a variety of activities related to a particular case or topic. Activities might include:

- Reader's theatre
- Role play (done either by participants or by a pre-selected group – perhaps members of the ethics committee, for example)
- Panel discussion featuring people involved with various aspects of a case or topic
- Activities on values exploration and clarification
- Small group discussion of cases
- Introduction to or practice with ethics policies and/or tools, and
- Audio/video presentations (YouTube videos, Fireside Chat videos, etc.) and discussion

All of these can be used in addition to (or even instead of) the traditional lecture or talk. This list is certainly not exhaustive; having new and creative presentations and activities can help make the message “stick”.

It seems to work best when the day ends around 3:00 or 3:30 – there's often a “saturation point” with ethics discussions such that participants get very tired toward the end of the day and, during the winter, ending mid-afternoon generally allows for travel time during daylight hours.

Input from presenters can influence the agenda, but it's useful to have a sense of what you need or want in advance of contacting presenters.

Pick a date – 3 months ahead

We recommend at least three months' notice to minimize the number of things being done at the last minute. Once a date has been finalized space can be booked. Dates might need to be flexible to accommodate speakers, so having some alternate dates is often helpful.

Find presenters – 3 months ahead

Generate a list of people inside and/or outside the organization who you think would be willing and/or able to present effectively on your chosen topic – if you need suggestions, please feel free to contact NSHEN. It's also helpful to have a few backup presenters as well.

Ethics days are also an excellent opportunity to involve a range of people who might not normally be involved in ethics activities – for example, health care providers with professional perspectives on the case or topic at hand. Having a range of perspectives available can help to ensure lively discussion, and it can be very effective to contrast clinical concerns with ethical concerns about a case.

Coordinate with various presenters – 2 months ahead

Make sure that presenters understand the objectives that they will be responsible for as well as the overall goals and format of the day.

If overnight accommodation will be required, clarify who will be responsible for arranging it – the organizers or the presenter(s). If necessary, book appropriate accommodation and make other travel arrangements.

Advertise the event – 2 months ahead

Lead time is important not only for presenter scheduling and preparedness but also for getting the word out – especially if part (or all) of the ethics day will be open to the public. You may want to invite local media if there's a portion of the events that will be accessible to the public.

A multi-pronged approach to publicity is ideal – internet advertisements, intranet posting, notices on message boards or in elevators, notices in the local media, posters on public bulletin boards, and word of mouth, for example, can reach different populations within the organization and the public (if applicable).

Arrange presentation logistics – 2 months ahead

Check with presenters to determine what AV and presentation equipment is required. A whiteboard or flip chart is often useful, as is a microphone (depending on the room). Other things that might be necessary include telehealth equipment, a projector, internet access, or way to connect a computer into the AV system.

Determine who will do photocopying for handouts – sometimes it is easier for this to be done by the presenter(s), but sometimes it is easier for the organizers to arrange it. If there are to be multiple handouts, it can be helpful to copy them onto different-coloured papers. If the organizers will be doing the photocopying, establish a deadline with the presenter for getting the files to the appropriate person.

Arrange refreshments (if applicable and/or necessary).

Confirmation – 1 week before

Confirm presentation details with the presenter(s) – when they will speak, the equipment they will need for the presentation, the handouts that should be ready (if applicable) and the agenda for the whole day.

Tell presenter(s) who they should contact in case of emergency. Get emergency contact information from presenter(s) (cell phone numbers, accommodation contact information, etc.)

Confirm travel details with presenter(s) – how they will be travelling, when they will be arriving, and where they will be staying.

Confirm arrangements for AV equipment and catering.

Topics for Ethics Days

Advance care planning (public)

Moral distress

Moral distress in the ICU

Ethics is for everyone

Disclosure policy

Organ donation

Noninvasive ventilation

End of life

Resource allocation & ICU

From Feedback About Topics People Want to See Addressed:

Everyday ethics

Futility and withholding/withdrawing treatment

Ethics of diversity in health care

Inclusion of diverse voices in ethics discussions

Personal responsibility for health

Difficult conversations

Truth-telling at end of life

Brain death

The “noncompliant” patient
Treatment decisions for terminally ill patients
Allocating palliative care resources
Public participation on ethics committees
Uses of decision making frameworks
Public expectations, resource allocation, and priority-setting frameworks
Hope and caregivers
Psychiatric advance directives
Priority setting and resource allocation in the organization
Discussion of new or forthcoming legislation
Applying the ethics lens to policy review
Professional autonomy and interprofessional conflict
Disclosure of errors

Ethics Day Check-List

<i>Task</i>	<i>Who - Person(s) Responsible</i>	<i>When - Deadline</i>
<i>Select topic(s) and establish objectives</i>		
<i>Decide format and create agenda</i>		
<i>Select date</i>		
<i>Select and contact presenter(s)</i>		
<i>Coordinate with presenter(s)</i>		
<i>Publicity</i>		
<i>Logistics</i>		

