

What is an ethical dilemma ?

Medical ethics; the values and guidelines governing decisions in medical practice.

An ethical dilemma involves a choice where we regardless of what we choose, violate etical values we are committed to.



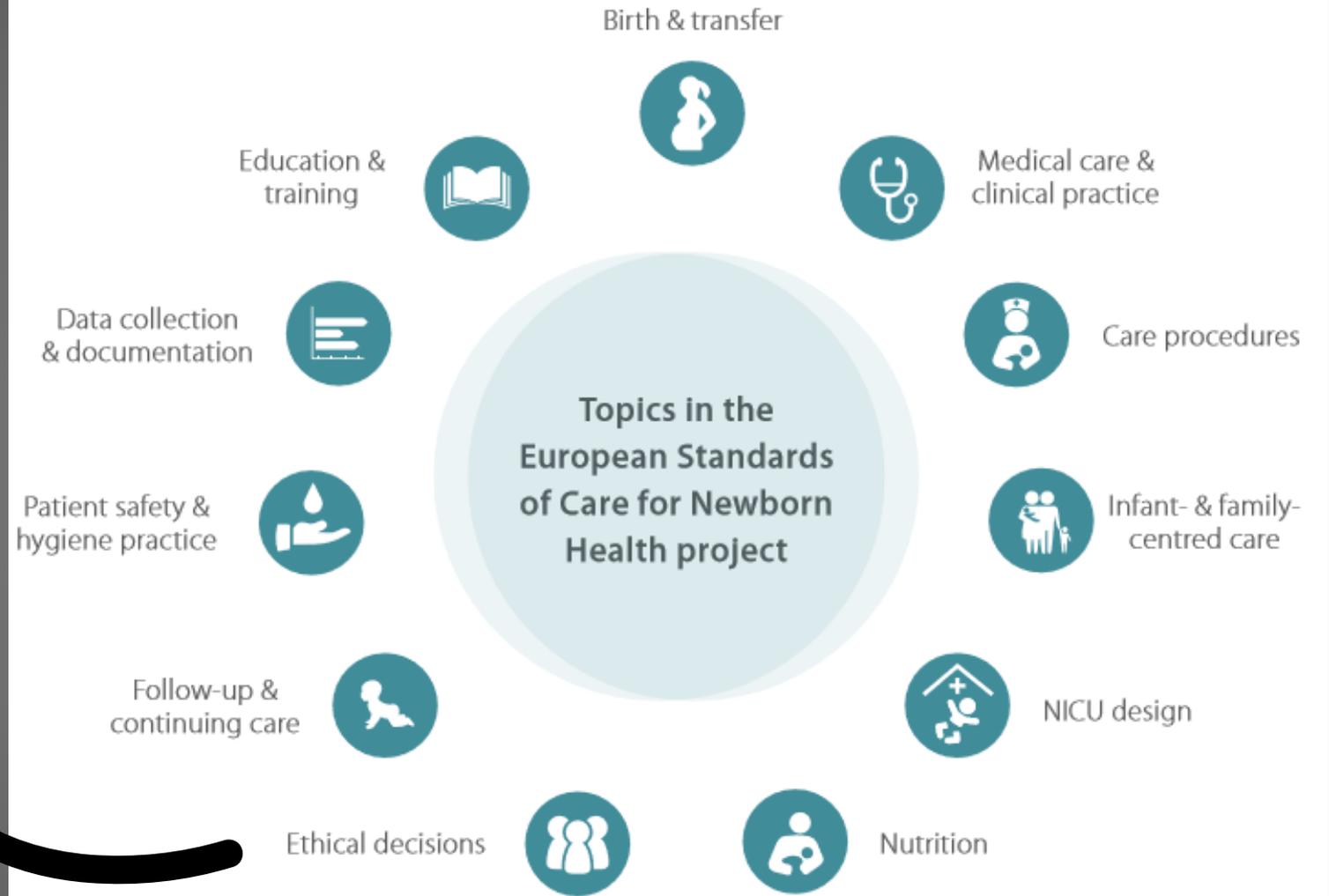


european standards of
care for newborn health

Ethical decisions



CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
THE QUALITY CIRCLE



The Topic Expert Group on Ethical decision-making and palliative care has developed four standards. These are:

- 1. Decisions of withholding or withdrawing life support**
- 2. Communication in ethically complex decisions**
- 3. Palliative care**
- 4. Rights of infants, parents, and families in difficult decisions.**

Decisions of withholding or withdrawing life support;

Statement of standard

Decisions of withholding or withdrawing life support are based on shared decision-making between parents and healthcare team taking into account the best interest of the infant and family in the context of the clinical situation and legal frameworks.

Benefits

Reduced suffering of the infant

Facilitated acceptance of the decision by involving families in the choices to be made

Reduced numbers of healthcare professionals suffering stress and 'burnout' when shared decision-making is used



Communication in ethically complex decisions;

- ***Statement of standard***
- Parents and healthcare professionals share all relevant information such as the conditions, prognosis, and choices for care of the infant, as well as the social situation, values, and preferences of parents.
- ***Benefits***
- Increased trust of parents that decisions are individualised, based on clinical factors and respect for their family values
- Improved understanding of healthcare planning in the short term, but also in the longer term when parents may reflect on the decisions that were made
- Reassurance that the best decisions have been made by healthcare professionals in close dialogue with families
- Improved ability to cope with stress that comes with caring for ill infants



Rights of infants, parents, and families in difficult decisions

Statement of standard

The rights of infants, parents, and families in difficult decisions are respected by healthcare professionals. The values behind any decisions that may compromise those rights are transparent.

Benefits

Best possible care is provided to infants that is aligned with their clinical situation and therapeutic goals set for them

Increased trust of parents and families that their rights are respected

Increased transparency allows an open discussion of issues



Palliative care;

Statement of standard

Interdisciplinary neonatal palliative care safeguards the quality of life of the infant and the family when a life limiting condition is diagnosed.

Benefits

Reduced suffering from pain and discomfort for infants

Improved support for parents during palliative care

Better informed healthcare professionals regarding care priorities and the wishes of parents

Better support for healthcare professionals in their role as palliative care providers



Where to go

- parent support groups.
- communication training for healthcare professionals.
- parental peer groups.
- parental feedback on the decision-making process are developed.
- training programmes in communication around decisions in limiting life support.
- counselling support available for healthcare professionals.
- establish a palliative care team at every neonatal unit



UiO : Institute of Health and Society

Faculty of Medicine

- Every Norwegian health care trust must have a Clinical Ethics Committee (CEC).
- The Centre for Medical Ethics (CME) at the University of Oslo is responsible for the national coordination and professional development of these committees.

The Clinical Ethics Committees will contribute to raising ethical consciousness and to ensuring the quality of difficult value judgments in Norwegian health trusts, in the best way possible for health care workers, patients and relatives.

How can we face ethical challenges and dilemmas?



Central points of the ethical discussion (The Six-Step Model)

1. What is the ethical problem /are the ethical problems in this case?
2. What are the facts of the case?
3. Who are the involved parties and what are their viewpoints and interests?
4. Relevant values, principles and virtues, experience from similar situations and judicial constraints?
5. Possible courses of action
6. Discuss the above and attempt to formulate one or more acceptable actions and a conclusion / summary

Centre for Medical Ethics



What is the ethical problem /are the ethical problems in this case?

- Sometimes it is obvious what the ethical dilemma is, but more often it is difficult to define the ethical dilemma. As the case becomes more illuminated and complexity increases, new ethical dilemmas may emerge.



What are the facts of the case?

- Quite often, a problem in medical-ethical dilemmas is that there is not satisfactory knowledge, yet a decision needs to be made. It is important for the uncertainties to be identified.

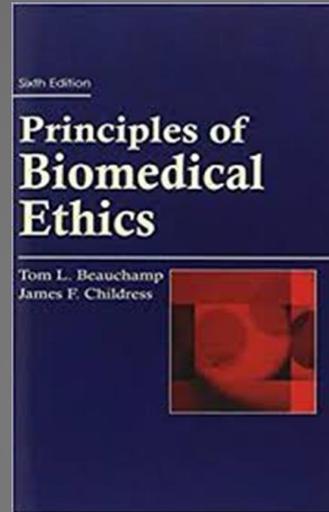


Who are the involved parties and what are their viewpoints and interests?

- the patient
- parents
- sibling.
- health personell
- others inside and outside the hospital who have been central in the course of the patient's treatment.
- if the treatment is especially resource-draining, other patients and society as a whole can be considered an involved party.

Relevant values, principles and virtues, experience from similar situations and judicial constraints?

- What a relevant value, principle, or virtue is will be inspired by different ethics approaches, such as utilitarianism, deontology, principlism, ethics of proximity, virtue ethics, and discourse ethics. In addition, norms of professional ethics will give insight.



Beauchamp and Childress (Four basic principles)

Autonomy

Free to make choices

Nonmaleficence

Do no harm

Beneficence

Doing good

Justice

Strive for equality in welfare and opportunity

- Health legislation does not usually give an answer to what is good practice, yet the legal framework of the case at hand needs to be clear.



Possible courses of action

- When many people meet, it is possible to find new alternative actions, while others can be discarded as a result of well-founded objections.



Discuss the above and attempt to formulate one or more acceptable actions and a conclusion / summary.

- Who and what weighs the heaviest of the ethical considerations?

Should, for example, the duty to uphold life come before the duty to prevent suffering?

What is the best interest of the child?

«are we doing something for the child or to the child....?»

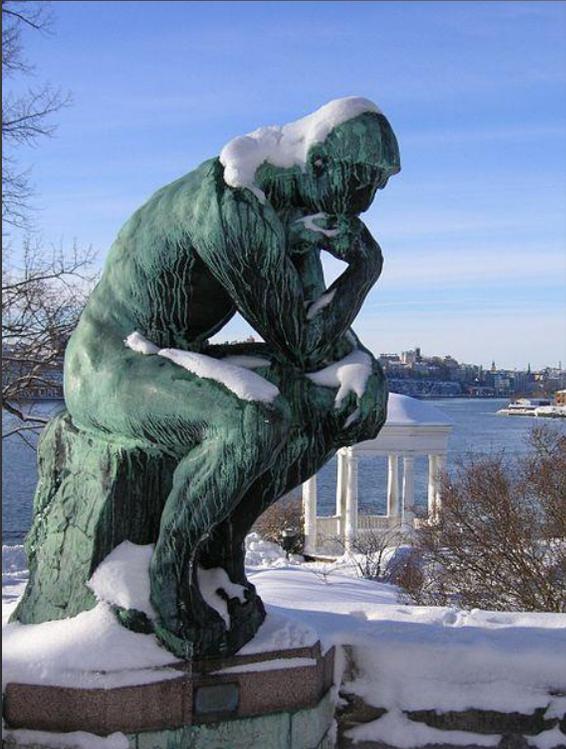


A systematic discussion of ethical dilemmas linked to an individual patient can have many aims:

- Advancing good practice
- Time and space for systematic, thorough and multidisciplinary ethics discussions
- To secure that all voices, especially that of the patient, are heard
- To raise ethical consciousness, ethical competence, and to share experiences within the hospital
- To ensure that relevant judicial constraints are clarified
- To contribute to conflict resolution and to highlight respect for different viewpoints
- Decision-making support for the treating clinician
- Ensuring the quality of difficult moral decisions
- To advance responsibility and documentation in ethically difficult choices
- To give advice if the involved parties ask for it

Ethical thinking can be learned

- Contributes to increased skills in identifying, analyzing and clarifying ethical problems and dilemmas.



Thank you for listening.

