



A framework for paediatric ethics

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Broad-brush things to think about

- What the relevant ethical considerations are
- The process by which the decision is made (inc who makes it)
- Different (and potentially competing) goals in ethically difficult situations
 - ethics is not just about ethics



1. Different goals in ethically difficult situations

- Do the right thing
- Minimise conflict
- Preserve reputation/standing of group
- Preserve personal integrity/conscience

(Hurst et al. How physicians face ethical difficulties.
J Med Ethics 2005; 31:7-14)

2. The decision-making process in ethically difficult situation - possibilities

Decision-maker could be:

- Head of dept
- Clinical ethicist/ethics committee
- Parents
- Treating team
- Negotiation between parents and treating team

or ..

Follow strict specific rules set by hospital

2. The decision-making process in ethically difficult situation - possibilities

Decision-maker could be:

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3. Relevant ethical considerations

- Ethical principles
- Specific interpretations of these
- The “facts” of the case
 - Agreed or disputed
 - Medical, social, personal etc

Ethical principles in health care

- **Promoting well-being**
 - Benefit
 - Non-harm
- **Respecting autonomy**
 - Informed consent – parental or child
- **Respecting privacy**
- **Fairness/justice**
 - Fair allocation of resources
 - Non-discrimination

} “best interests”



Ethical principles in paediatrics

- Act in best interests of child
 - Promote well-being
 - Protect future-related interests
- Respect parents as decision-makers for the child
- Respect child's (developing) autonomy
- Respect privacy of child and family
- Allocate resources at your disposal fairly
- Promote well-being of family



Putting principles to work in particular cases

- Different interpretations or dimensions of each principle
- Clashes – different principles require different things

Ethics in end of life care: basic principles

- Withdrawing and withholding medical treatment are ethically acceptable in some circumstances (inc. artificial nutrition and hydration)
- Prolong life at all costs is not ethically appropriate – must consider comparative benefits and burdens to child
- Importance of advance care planning
- Parents as decision-makers
 - Proxy for the child
 - Best placed to know what is best for their own child
 - Most likely to have the child best interests' most strongly at heart

End of life care (cont)

- Parents' decisions are overrideable when their decisions are significantly contrary to child's interests
 - Deciding to continue treatment when this causes excessive burden or suffering to child, not in proportion with benefit gained
 - Deciding against treatment when the benefits of treatment warrant treatment eg when there is a good prospect of prolonging life of reasonable quality in terms of the child's experience
- Legal intervention as a last resort
- Doctors do not have an absolute ethical obligation to do whatever parents want



Discussion of cases



Summary - What ethics is about

- Being aware of widely acknowledged values or principles
- Putting these into practice in a real-life context
- Trying to balance competing values

NOT:

- Following rules
- Each person following their own instincts

Ethical practice

- All health professionals have a legitimate claim to be involved in ethically significant decisions about patients under their care
- To do this effectively, you must be able to think through and articulate the issues as they appear to you
- Often looking for a compromise position, especially in a team environment
- May not be one right answer



Accessing RCH Clinical Ethics Service

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