Overview of Ethical Principles For Dentistry

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Overview

General Topics

1. Analysis of ethical issues
2. Protection of human subjects
3. Responsibilities of researchers
4. Authorship
5. Scientific misconduct
Purpose

To examine the concept of ethics, its underlying philosophical principles, and the problems of defining ethical behavior in health sciences.
ETHICS AND MORALS

All professional work involves evaluations- good, bad, right, wrong, recommended, risk, harm, treatment choice, scientifically indicated. Not all are moral or ethical.
ETHICS AND MORALS

- There must be an evaluation of actions or behavior of persons
- Ultimacy-standard is ultimate
- Universality- all should judge it the same way
ETHICS AND MORALS

- Altruism/Neutralism- not tailored to the advantage of the judge
- Publicity- must be willing to state publicly the basis of the decision
- Ordering- a ranking of the conflicting claims
Morals refer to specific judgments and individual actions.

Ethics refers to systematic reflection and codes of conduct.
ETHICAL VERSUS LEGAL

An act may be unethical but legal
(you legally may be able to provide orthodontics but unethical if you are not fully trained to do so) and illegal but ethical (Erin Brockovitch collecting samples from private property).
SEEKING A FOUNDATION FOR ETHICS

- Cultural relativism
- Personal standards
- Professional codes
- Universal standards
THEORIES OF NORMATIVE ETHICS

1. Action Theory
2. Utilitarianism
3. Deontological Theory
4. Prima Facie & Proper Duty
5. Value Theory
6. Virtue Theory
1. Action Theory

A theory of right action gives the principles that make an action right or wrong. Is the behavior morally acceptable.
Action Theory-continued

- BENEFICENCE
  - doing good
- NON-MALEFICENCE
  - doing no harm
- VERACITY-telling the truth

- FIDELITY-keeping promises
- AUTONOMY-respecting autonomy of others
- JUSTICE-treating others fairly
- AVOID KILLING
2. Utilitarianism And Consequentialist Theories

- Acts should be judged in terms of their consequences (beneficence, nonmaleficence)
- The greatest good for the greatest number
3. Deontological Theories

- Actions not based on consequences but on duty
- Autonomy, veracity, fidelity, justice
- Thou shalt not kill
4. Prima Facie & Duty Proper

- Prima facie- duty based on a single moral dimension or principle
- Duty proper- takes into account all relevant principles and uses a theory to reconcile (acting in the public good may involve doing harm).
5. Value Theory

All theories include some notion of what counts as good or bad. Some base it on subjective notions others try to objectify it.
6. Virtue Theory

The ethical judgments may be about character. Virtues are seen as persistent dispositions or traits. Here the focus is on the actor not the actions. [Doing harm for good reasons vs doing good for bad ones; ends justify the means]
THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

A. Autonomy

- Ability to think, judge & act independently without undue influence
- Right to make informed decisions
- Right to privacy
- Freedom of choice
- Responsible for actions
A. Autonomy

Two issues: autonomy itself & respect for autonomy

- Often seen as the highest principle
- May conflict with doing harm to others e.g. smoking
B. Non-maleficence

Inflict no harm on others. Includes such rules as not to cause pain, disable, steal, commit adultery but it may also include lying, deriving of freedom.
C. Beneficence

Actions must enhance welfare. Where non-malfeasance requires restraint, beneficence requires positive action. A key element for the “helping” professions.
D. Justice

- Treating people fairly
- Giving people what they deserve
- Giving people what they are entitled to
- Distributive justice - distribution of benefits and burdens
E. Principles Of Justice

- To each an equal share
- To each according to need
- To each according to effort

- To each according to contribution
- To each according to merit
- To each according to free-market exchange
E. Theories Of The Distribution Of Justice

- Utilitarian- distribution based on need, the greatest good for the greatest number (beneficence & non-maleficence)
- Libertarian- free market exchange (autonomy)
- Egalitarian- society creates an equal distribution
F. Veracity

Telling the truth implies respect for the person, for their autonomy, and their right to make independent decisions.
G. Fidelity

Keep your promises & commitments

- Abandonment
- Confidentiality
H. Avoidance Of Killing

- Active killing where actions foreshorten life
- Passive killing where you simply forgo treatment at the patient’s or families request.
Hippocratic Oath

- I will prescribe regimens for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone.
- I will not give a lethal drug to anyone if I am asked, nor will I advise such a plan; and similarly I will not give a woman a pessary to cause an abortion.
- But I will preserve the purity of my life and my arts.
Hippocratic Oath

- I will not cut for stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art.

- In every house where I come I will enter only for the good of my patients, keeping myself far from all intentional ill-doing and all seduction and especially from the pleasures of love with women or with men, be they free or slaves.
Hippocratic Oath

- All that may come to my knowledge in the exercise of my profession or in daily commerce with men, which ought not to be spread abroad, I will keep secret and will never reveal.
- If I keep this oath faithfully, may I enjoy my life and practice my art, respected by all men and in all times; but if I swerve from it or violate it, may the reverse be my lot.
Hippocratic Oath

- To consider dear to me, as my parents, him who taught me this art; to live in common with him and, if necessary, to share my goods with him; To look upon his children as my own brothers, to teach them this art.
Professional Ethical Codes
Environmental Epidemiologists

Ethics for Daily Lives

1. Avoid contradictions between your life and your professional role (no heavy polluting vehicles)
2. Keep your home clean and avoid creating pollution
3. When it can not be avoided keep it to a minimum, do it openly and use it for change
4. Never conceal a contradiction in your roles
5. Participate visibly, outside working hours, in community efforts to improve the environment
6. Concentrate on living a lifestyle that has less environmental impact than those around you
7. Do not try to be perfect or completely non-polluting because this is impossible
Analysis of Ethical Issues

1. UCLA method for ethical issue analysis
UCLA Analysis of Ethical Issues

- The goal of the Ethical Decision-Making Model is to assist students in developing their ability to think through an ethical decision or dilemma.
- Professionals face situations throughout their careers which require a careful weighing of the options.
- There is often no "right" or "wrong" decision. Instead, there are a variety of decisions, each of which has an element of "rightness."
- The goal is to provide a framework for deciding the best course of action for you (and other concerned parties) in the situation.
Analysis of Ethical Issues

- This decision-making process requires a series of steps, looking at the problem from your perspective as well as that of the other concerned parties.
- With practice, you will gain a proficiency for quickly "sizing up" the situation from all sides, just as an experienced clinician can differentiate between normal and abnormal with a quick glance and touch.
- This decision-making process will allow you to respond to situations which occur in clinical practice.
Analysis of Ethical Issues

1. **Identify the ethical decision or problem**
   Many situations are simply never perceived to be ethical decisions or problems. Once the problem has been recognized, the professional must clearly and succinctly state the ethical question, showing all pertinent sides to the problem. This requires the professional to take the perspective of the other person and recognize how the decision will affect that person. There may often be more than one way to frame a problem or ethical decision.
Analysis of Ethical Issues

2. Collect information
The professional needs to gather information in order to make an informed decision. This typically includes factual information about the situation as it developed, and it may come from more than one source. You may also need information on values, both yours and those of the other parties involved in the situation.
Analysis of Ethical Issues

3. State the options

Having gathered all of the necessary information, “brainstorm” to identify the many possible options or alternatives. The best decision is usually not the first one which comes to mind. Often, we tend to think that there is only one choice. This step forces us to stop and view the situation from all angles to identify what other people might see as alternative choices.
Analysis of Ethical Issues

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Analysis of Ethical Issues

4. Apply the ethical principles to the options (continued)

In the “pro” column, show alternatives which protect or keep this principle from being violated. In the “con” column, state how an alternative could violate the principle. Do this for each option. This process will enable you to see which of the ethical principles are in conflict in this situation.
Analysis of Ethical Issues

5. Make the decision
With each alternative clearly outlined in terms of “pros” and “cons,” you have a reasonable head start on making the decision. Look at each option and see how many “pros” and “cons” each decision would result in. Weigh the seriousness of the “cons,” and remember that, as a professional, you are obliged to put the patient's interests first. Frequently, simply by examining the options in a careful way, it becomes obvious which is the best solution to an ethical decision.
Analysis of Ethical Issues

5. Make the decision (continued)
Consider both short- and long-term results. If two or more parties are involved in a true ethical dilemma, there is no easy solution and the professional must choose between hard options. However, the decision-making process has not been in vain, it has allowed you to stop and carefully weigh your position before making the decision.
6. **Implement the decision**

The final step involves acting on the decision which has been made. The decision-making process will have been in vain if you fail to act. Many decisions fail because they are never implemented.
Worksheet for Ethical Decision Making

1. Identify the Ethical Dilemma:

2. State your decision on what to do:

3. State the principle(s) you used to make your decision, and describe how they apply to your decision.

4. List “pros” and “cons” of actions and related principles:

   | PRO          | CON
   |--------------|----
   |              |    |
A Case Study

Dr. Coulter holds a clinic practice every Saturday from 9am to 2 pm. At 1.30 he receives a call from a patient who claims she has an emergency, is in acute pain and requires immediate care. He has treated this patient in the past but because she fails to complete her care and to respond to call backs he has recently sent her a notice that he will no longer be her dentist. Because of this and because his staff and he will be delayed if he agrees to treat her today he instructs his receptionist to tell the patient to come in on Monday and he will see her then but he cannot see her today.
A Case Study

Dr. Pope was an instructor in removable prosthodontics. She has just seen Mary Heckman, a third year student forge another faculty member’s signature on a patient chart. She and Mary have known each other for years, beginning as family friends and now as faculty and student. Dr. Pope was going to say hello but got close enough to see the forgery and stopped. Mary was unaware of her presence. Dr. Pope did not know what to do. Under the school guidelines she is obligated to report Mary to the judicial board. However her personal friendship may prevent her doing that. What should she do?
A Case Study

After a “60 Minutes” program on CBS raised questions about the safety of amalgam, many of Dr. Barnes’ patients came into his office with concerns about the amalgam restorations that he had put in their teeth. The program had prompted the fear that mercury from the restorations might precipitate any number of symptoms or illnesses ranging from immunological disturbances to multiple sclerosis. He had read as much as he could about this controversy and had concluded that the American Dental Association was correct: there was no objective evidence to substantiate these concerns. On the other hand, he personally felt there was a reasonable basis for concern and that the mercury was a problem.
Dr. Barnes was not happy about the prospect of removing the amalgam restorations. Amalgam had been in use for over 100 years, and the alternative materials were either more expensive or had inferior physical properties. He decided to take the position recommended by the ADA. He would remove the amalgam restorations if requested by his patients, but only after a thorough discussion about the problems of the alternatives. For those patients who raised no concerns, he decided not to discuss the issue at all. However, this latter decision bothered him. He felt that the absence of definitive evidence of harm did not necessarily certify that the amalgam restorations were completely harmless either. He began to wonder if he should inform his “quiet” patients about his concerns.
Evaluating the Ethical Analysis

M. Bedeau, University of Minnesota

1. Does it discuss each of the issues and points of ethical conflict
2. Are each affected party’s interest considered
3. Are the consequences of each action considered
4. Are the obligations of the protagonist described and based on moral/ethical grounds (justified ethically)
CONCLUSION

- Ethics are complicated
- They involve the most fundamental questions about being human
- They are often controversial
- Getting professionals to follow them is like herding cats
Between a Rock and a Hard Place