# A Model for Ethical Decision Making

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## Four Component Model of Ethical Actions

▸ Sensitivity to ethical issues
▸ Ethical reasoning and judgment
▸ Ethical motivation
▸ Ethical implementation
  ◦ Decision and choice to act

Rest, 1983

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## A Model of Ethical Decision Making

▸ Recognizing the problem or concern
▸ Identifying possible alternatives
▸ Determining what is professionally at stake
▸ Determining what else is ethically at stake
▸ Determining what ought to be done
▸ Choosing a course of action

Ozar and Sokol, 2004

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## Recognizing the Problem or Concern – Case 1 (USA)

▸ Conflict of focus between advisor and students
▸ Care advocated by faculty
  ◦ Existing program
  ◦ At-risk/in-need group BUT not focused on "working poor"
  ◦ Comprehensive care with capacity for follow-up
▸ Care advocated by students
  ◦ Not served by existing program
  ◦ Poorly served group
  ◦ High profile, but one-time care with no commitment for follow-up
▸ Community involvement in planning?

## Identifying the Alternatives

▸ What courses of actions are available?

◦ Sometimes very evident…no careful thought needed

◦ Other times very difficult because our own habitual ways of perceiving and acting can cloud our vision of options

◦ Need to consider potential outcomes and how these might affect future choices

## Identifying the Alternatives

▸ Continue participation in existing program
▸ Agree to participate in one-time event
▸ Do both
▸ Expand existing program so as to include additional at-risk group of individuals
▸ Develop pool of practitioners to provide follow-up care
▸ Educate students about one-time care concerns
▸ Ask the community for input

## Determining What is Professionally at Stake

▸ Based on the principles/norms/values of the profession, what ought to or ought not be done
◦ If based on these, judgments can be more precise and made with greater confidence

## Determining What is Professionally at Stake

◦ General/oral health
◦ Nonmaleficence
◦ Justice
◦ Beneficence
  • (vs. benevolence)
◦ Patient Autonomy

◦ Work to achieve community health
◦ Priorities developed with input from community
◦ Basic resources for health accessible to all

| Principles/Values | Public Health |
|---|---|

## Determining What Else is Ethically at Stake

- Broader view of what should or should not be done
- Moral content of the individual
  - We all interpret central values/ethical codes and make choices as individuals
- Conflicts among professional commitments
- Specific case circumstances that are unique to the situation at hand

## Determining What Else is Ethically at Stake

- Throughout the state
- Chronic care with follow-up
- Care for at-risk group
- History predicts future?
- Opportunity
  - Advocacy
  - Education

- Single site
- Uncertain follow-up capacity
- Care for at-risk group
- No history, future?
- Opportunity
  - Advocacy
  - Education

| Existing program | Proposed Event |

## Determining What Ought to be Done

- Ranking the alternatives
  - Is one clearly better than all the rest?
  - If complex, then the choice realistically becomes a choice between alternative values, rules, virtues and professional norms

- If able to rank them as above, then can distinguish:
  - what could be done
  - what absolutely should not be done
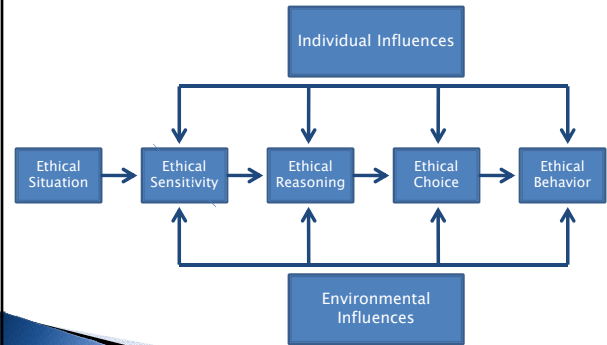
## Implementation: Choosing a Course of Action

- Deciding and choosing to act are different
  - WHY?
- Could identify what *should* be done, but then:
  - Not do it
  - Do something different
- *Implementation* is a two step process
  - Determining what should be done
  - Choosing to <u>do</u>

## Recognizing the Problem or Concern – Case 2 (International)

- Failure to address licensure
- Plan to deliver care is beyond scope of ethical and safe practice
  - Pre-dental students doing extractions and in charge of infection control

- Does this case represent an ethical dilemma?

## Ethical Decision Making



## Why do Professionals Sometimes Fail in Their Responsibility?

- Don't recognize the ethical issue
- Defective reasoning
- Lack of clarity about professional obligations
- Lack of courage or "know-how" to resolve a problem effectively or failure to act

- Lack of commitment to professional ideals
- Deficiencies of character and competence

taken from work by James Rest (1983), Muriel Bebeau and colleagues

## Resources for Professional Ethics in Dentistry

- Dental Ethics at Chairside
  - David Ozar and David Sokol, 2004

- Ethical Questions in Dentistry
  - James Rule and Robert Veach, 2004

- Ethics and Law in Dental Hygiene
  - Phyllis Beemsterboer, 2010