



# ETHICS CONSULTATION SERVICE

What supports are available when making difficult healthcare decisions?\*

*Important choices are best made through open discussion among all those involved: patients, family, supports, physicians, nurses and other members of the health care team. Often, such discussion will be enough to resolve ethical issues.*

## WHAT IS THE ETHICS CONSULTATION SERVICE?

For help with decision making, St. Joseph's Health System offers the services of a Bioethicist.

The Bioethicist is available to provide help through ethics case consultation to those directly involved in situations that pose ethical dilemmas.

## ETHICS CASE CONSULTATION

In an ethics case consultation the role of the Bioethicist is to help patients, their families and health professionals identify, clarify and work through ethical concerns that may arise in complex clinical situations.

The Bioethicist promotes communication among those involved, and often brings to the discussion knowledge of current thinking on the issues, to help think about the bigger picture.

Ethics consultation is an advisory service. This means that the Bioethicist will help guide the discussion and will offer advice and assistance to facilitate the process of decision making; but, the Bioethicist does not make the decisions. It is up to patients, patient supports, family members and professionals to remain responsible for their own decisions after consulting ethics.

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT ETHICAL DECISIONS

Clinical decisions in health care often have some ethical aspects to them because they involve choices about "What should be done?" which is the basic question of ethics.

Sometimes patients, families and health care professionals face difficult decisions about treatments, decisions that involve moral principles, religious beliefs or professional guidelines.

Healthcare ethics consultations attempts to help others to engage in a thoughtful exploration of how to act well and make morally good choices based on beliefs and values about life, health, suffering and death.

## WHAT ARE SOME COMMON ETHICAL QUESTIONS?

Generally, ethical questions arise when the right thing to do is not clear, or when people disagree about what is best for a person who is ill. Some examples of questions are:

When should life support such as a ventilator be withdrawn?

What should family members do when there is a disagreement about a patient's care or treatment plan?

Should a patient "at risk" be allowed to go home?



## OTHER ETHICS RESOURCES

The Bioethicist works with the Ethics Committees in each of the organizations of the St. Joseph's Health System.

In addition to ethics case consultation, the Ethics Consultation Service helps enhance patient care by providing assistance in three other areas:

1. Ethics education
2. Policy development and review
3. Research and review of research

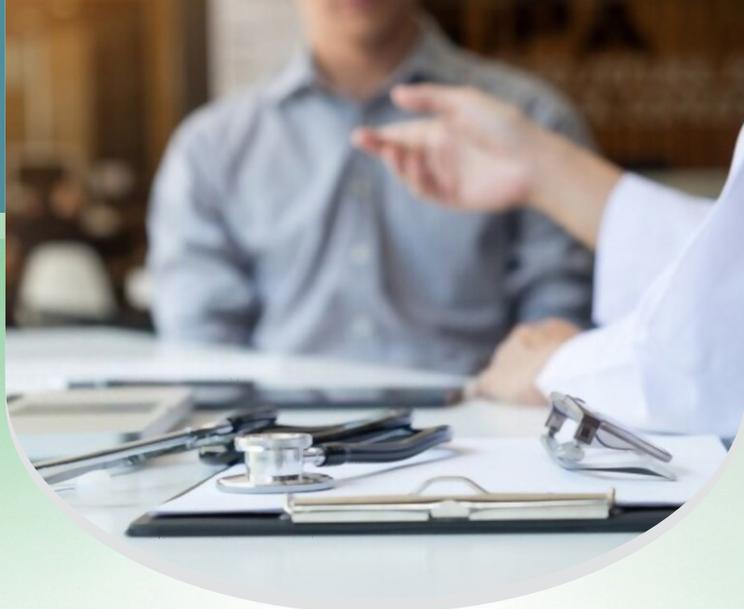
To speak to St. Joseph's Health System's Bioethicist, please call 905-522-1155 ext. 33866. If it is after business hours or on weekends, please speak to your healthcare team to have the Bioethicist on-call paged.

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St. Joseph's Health System is a member of the Centre for Clinical Ethics at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.



\*This guide provides general information about the current law in this subject area. However, legal information is not the same as legal advice, where legal advice is the application of law to an individual's specific circumstances. Although we have tried to make sure that the information in this guide is accurate and useful, we recommend that you consult a lawyer if you want professional legal advice in this subject area that is appropriate to your particular situation.



## WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION IS OFFERED?

Professionals can develop their skills in attending to ethical issues through a number of formats:

- Educational rounds
- In-services
- Group discussions
- Individual discussions
- Scheduled seminars

Among other opportunities, there are Grand Ethics Rounds held bimonthly at noon on Wednesdays, alternating with Ethics Committee meetings.

Please call (905) 522-1155 ext. 33866 for details regarding Ethics Rounds.

Events are held somewhat less frequently at other organizations and sites including:

- St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton
- St. Joseph's Home Care
- St. Joseph's Villa Dundas
- St. Mary's General Hospital
- St. Joseph's Health Centre Guelph

## WHO MAY REQUEST ETHICS CONSULTATION?

Anyone directly involved in a situation that raises ethical questions may request an ethics consultation

- Any member of Health Care Team
- Patients or Persons receiving care
- Patient Supports (family or partners in care)

Any staff member may request educational help on ethical issues.