What is the Consortium Ethics Program (CEP)?

The collaborative continuing healthcare ethics educational program and regional resource network in western Pennsylvania.

• Provides members with a basic and advanced education in the major concepts and theoretical frameworks of bioethics and promotes clinical ethical problem-solving skills.

• Fosters a mutually respectful environment where healthcare providers and payers, regardless of corporate affiliation, talk about similar experiences and dilemmas, and advise each other on possible resolutions.

• Directed by Rosa Lynn Pinkus, PhD; Jody Stockdill, administrator; and Sarah Sudar, communications specialist.

  • Co-sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Department of Medicine and the Center for Bioethics and Health Law.

  • Originally funded through the Vira I. Heinz Endowment (1990-1996), the program has been self-supporting based on the participation fees of its members and the contributions of sponsoring organizations since 1996.

What is the goal of the CEP?

To cost-effectively educate frontline healthcare professionals to become ethics resource persons and educators within their own institution. Many of our members currently serve as chair/co-chair of their ethics committee.

Who are our members?

• Our current membership consists of 28 institutional members from hospitals throughout western Pennsylvania and 3 individual members.

• Since 1990, the CEP has enrolled 71 healthcare institutions throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, including acute care hospitals, long-term care and home healthcare facilities. Recently, the CEP has expanded its membership to include third-party payers, such as Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield and UPMC Health Plan.

• We have educated over 400 “frontline” healthcare professionals, including administrators, physicians, nurses, social workers, risk managers, pastoral care, and payer utilization reviewers.
What are the benefits of CEP membership?

- **Annual Ethics Retreat** – Provides intensive ethics education and opportunities for networking with other CEP members.

- **Educational Seminars** – Offered four-times a year in Basic, Advanced, and Associates’ tracks; each track is a 3-year program. The first year identifies and defines the principles of medical ethics; the second year explores the connection between law and ethics; and the third year examines the relationship linking ethics and the medical humanities.

- **Online Discussion Board** – Enhances the ethics education of all members by overcoming distance and time barriers. This online site enables members to follow-up on topics covered in seminars, post cases, discuss issues, and share their experience with other members.

- **On-Site Programming** – Enables staff in member institutions to receive the same type of practical ethics education that CEP representatives receive. Each member institution is entitled to a maximum of 6 on-site programs per year. These “outreach” programs are generated by request of the representatives who assess the needs of their hospitals and institutions.

- **Ethics Survey** – Completed by each institution’s representatives, this survey guides the CEP in tailoring on-site programs to meet the specific needs of each institution.

- **Joint Commission Guidelines** – Recognize that the “ethical practitioner” must be supported by an ethical organization. The CEP provides an annual summary of CEP educational offerings and how this programming meets the ethics requirement of the standards.

- **Continuing Education Certification** – Provided for physicians, nurses, social workers, and other healthcare professionals at CEP retreats and education seminars.

**On-site programming: a closer look**

The CEP has provided over 900 programs to hospitals and institutions throughout western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio in the past 18 years. As committees have evolved from novelty to necessity at hospitals nationwide, the CEP’s role in supporting member institution’s goals for ethics planning has grown significantly. Most requested topics include:

- **End-of-Life Issues**: Advance directives/DNR, devising ethics policies, futility, withholding/withdrawing treatments, physician assisted suicide, and palliative care.

- **Basic Issues in Healthcare Ethics**: Core concepts and principles that form the framework to approach all healthcare ethics dilemmas. Topics include informed consent, ethics in clinical practice, confidentiality, decision-making capacity, and ethical theory.

- **Organizational Ethics**: Bedside rationing, managed care, staff and patient rights, pandemic ethics, and organizational policy development.

As the ethics needs of healthcare systems change, the CEP’s programming changes to meet these needs!