

EDUCATION

Consortium Ethics Program: A Jumpstart to Clinical Ethics Education

Mrs. Smith is an 80-year-old woman who has had multiple admissions to the hospital for congestive heart failure and recently has had difficulty swallowing thin liquids. She reports no longer having any desire to eat or drink, and has taken nothing by mouth for a week. The patient is refusing the insertion of a feeding tube to provide nutrition and hydration, but her son is insisting that a feeding tube be placed. The treatment team does not want to force an unwanted intervention upon the patient, even though they feel it would be in her best interest. The patient's son is persistent in his request for the placement of the feeding tube and has begun to question his mother's decision-making capacity.

Far from being the exception, ethically complex cases such as Mrs. Smith's are common in the health care setting and seasoned professionals resolve these types of dilemmas daily. Most, however, do not have the time to "stand back" and reflect on their decisions. This "standing back" and reflecting about what "should be done" is one definition of professional ethics. What IS the patient's decision-making capacity? While it is the right of a competent patient to refuse any treatment—including life-sustaining treatment, what if a physician believes treating the patient is in her best interest? A physician does have an obligation to respect the patient's right to make autonomous decisions, but what should be done if the patient is no longer competent? Who is an appropriate surrogate? What if that surrogate does not act in accordance with the patient's previously expressed wishes?

A lack of training, vocabulary or knowledge of professional ethics frameworks can cause a physician to not fully or comfortably identify and address such issues. When health professionals are uncertain as to how to proceed in the face of troubling issues, they may consult their facility's ethics committee, or ethics consultation service. Yet, what if ethics committee members and/or ethics consultants have little more training in ethics than those who requested the ethics consult?



BY VALERIE B. SATKOSKE, PH.D.

One of the three primary functions of an institutional ethics committee is to educate its members and the members of its health care community regarding clinical ethics. A valuable source of health care ethics education and training in the Western Pennsylvania region is the Consortium Ethics Program (CEP) of the University of Pittsburgh. The most general goal of the CEP is to provide a cost-effective way to assist health care professionals, their institutions,

and the local health care community in developing and sustaining an awareness and expertise in clinical health care ethics to enhance patient care, policy formation, and ethics consultation.

The CEP stays abreast of the clinical ethics literature and emergent standards as proposed by professional bodies such as the Joint Commission and the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH). Recently the ASBH has formed a committee to define standards and explore the possibility of credentialing for clinical ethics consultants. The CEP will follow the progress of this newly formed committee and explore educational tools to fulfill emergent professional standards.

In light of what appears to be a trend toward more formalized ethics education in the health care setting, utilization of the resources available through membership in the CEP will become increasing valuable. In addition to educational offerings such as the CEP, health care professionals who are interested in expanding their knowledge of health care ethics might also inquire about joining the ethics committee at their institution; seek continuing education credits in health care ethics; or even pursue education at the university level through ethics certificate programs and graduate level degrees in health care ethics, some of which can be accessed online. Just a few examples of the educational opportunities available to those interested in getting started in the field of health care ethics.

For more information about educational opportunities with the CEP, contact the CEP office at (412) 647-5834 or cep@pitt.edu and visit www.pitt.edu/~cep.

Western Pennsylvania's Ethics Education Network

CONSORTIUM ETHICS PROGRAM NOW ENROLLING MEMBERS FOR 2010!

OUR MISSION: to provide "cost-effective" education and training in the language and methods of health care ethics to front-line health care professionals.

- Institutional and Individual memberships available
- Three-year educational model (practical foundations, health care ethics/law, health care ethics/humanities)
- On-site Education for hospital staff
- Targeted Programming for ethics committees

COME MEET US!

Learn more about the CEP, our educational offerings and membership opportunities!

BASIC ISSUES IN HEALTH CARE ETHICS CONFERENCE

Tuesday, December 8, 2009 8:00 am - 4:00 pm Hospital Council of Western Pennsylvania
\$30.00 Registration Lunch Provided Continuing education credits offered
R.S.V.P Required

Jody Stockdill
412-647-5832
joc10@pitt.edu
www.pitt.edu/~cep

The University of Pittsburgh
Consortium Ethics Program
3708 Fifth Avenue, Suite 300
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Eye-Opening. Thought-Provoking. Exceptional.

These are the words that current students have used to praise Saint Vincent College's Health Services Leadership program.

Enrollment is now open for the new 4 course, 12 credit graduate certificate or the 12 course, 36 credit Master of Science degree program.

Classes are conveniently held during afternoons and evenings at Saint Vincent College, Latrobe Hospital, and Memorial Medical Center in Johnstown.

Advance Your Career with a Master of Science or Graduate Certificate in Health Services Leadership

Access additional information and a video overview online at:
www.stvincent.edu/graduateprograms

Or contact:
Lisa Glessner at 724-805-2933
or gradadmission@stvincent.edu



SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE

Our Reputation says it all !!!!

Fall

Come to learn more . . .

Information Session

Provides:

- Overview of Accelerated 2nd Degree BSN, RN Options, Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs
- Review of the application process
- Helpful tips for completing your prerequisites and application requirements
- Financial aid information
- Insight into the Pitt Nursing experience
- Resources and support available to Pitt students

Wednesday, September 30, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

Thursday, October 22, 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm

Tuesday, November 18, 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm

CICL Multipurpose Room, 2nd floor Victoria Building
R.S.V.P. by phone: 412-624-2405 or by email: pittnurs@pitt.edu

University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing
www.nursing.pitt.edu
1-888-747-0794

