

Practice Standard- Code of Ethics

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Revised: N/A

Definition

The ability to make appropriate ethical decisions that are in the best interests of patients/clients is an essential aspect of professional practice.

Overview

Members are responsible for conducting themselves as ethically as possible in every professional practice situation. To assist members in determining the most appropriate ethical conduct in situations of uncertainty, the College has adopted a values-based Code of Ethics and a stepwise decision-making model.

The Code of Ethics reflects members' commitment to use their knowledge and expertise to promote high quality, competent and ethical care for patients/clients and thereby instill public confidence in the profession.

The ethical values for members should be applied in all aspects of professional practice, particularly in the patient/client relationship and when facing an ethical problem or dilemma. Making ethical decisions is not always easy and can be accompanied by significant discomfort. While the Code of Ethics cannot alleviate this discomfort, adopting the values and a standard process to analyze a situation will allow members to feel more secure in their ability to make the best decision possible that is also in the best interest of their patients.

There are a variety of ethical decision making models available and although one version is presented here, members should choose a model that is most comfortable to them and meets their professional needs. Members should also understand that while a consistent process can be followed each time an ethical decision is required, the decision or outcome can vary because the context in which the decision is being made varies. There can be differences of opinion and it is not expected that there will always be complete agreement. The proposed actions to an ethical dilemma can include both those who are in favour and those who are opposed to the decision. Although there may not be complete agreement on one unique line of action, some actions will be more defensible and others will be less defensible. Following a consistent and reasoned process to ethical decision making will, however, increase the likelihood that even those opposed to the decision will respect it.

Principles of Ethical Conduct

Respect

Members are respectful of the differing needs of each individual and honour the patient's right to privacy, confidentiality, dignity and treatment without discrimination.

Excellence

Members are committed to excellence in professional practice through continued development of knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes.

Autonomy and Well Being

Members are at all times guided by a concern for the patient's well-being. Patients have the right to self-determination and are empowered to participate in decisions about their health-related quality of life and physical functioning.

Communication, Collaboration and Advocacy

Members value the contribution of all individuals involved in the care of a patient. Communication, collaboration and advocacy are essential to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Honesty and Integrity

Each member's commitment to act with honesty and integrity is fundamental to the delivery of high quality, safe and professional services.

Steps to Ethical Decision-Making

1. Recognize that there is an ethical issue- I.e. something is making you uncomfortable.
2. Identify the problem and who is involved- What is making you uncomfortable? Who else is involved?
3. Consider the relevant facts, laws, principles and values- What laws or standards might apply? What ethical value or ethical principle is involved?
4. Establish and analyze potential options- Weigh possibilities and outcomes. Use your moral imagination.
5. After undertaking Steps 1 through 4, choose a course of action and implement it- Are there any barriers to action? What information should be recorded?
6. Evaluate the outcome and determine if further action is needed- What did you learn? What can you do to prevent future occurrence?