

Teaching Ethical Decision-Making Through Chaplaincy

Lessons from End-of-Life Care and Marginalized Populations

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Why Chaplaincy Matters

Chaplains serve at the intersection of spirituality, ethics, healthcare, and human experience. Through relationships with patients, families, and vulnerable populations, chaplains encounter ethical dilemmas that reveal questions of meaning, suffering, dignity, values, culture, and decision-making.

Chaplaincy narratives provide powerful opportunities for ethics education because they connect ethical theory with real human experiences.

Major Themes

End-of-Life Care

Ethical questions frequently include:

- What matters most to the patient?
- How should suffering be understood?
- What are the patient's goals of care?
- How should families be supported?
- How can clinicians honor human dignity?

Marginalized Youth & Young Adults

Ethical concerns often involve:

- Health Equity
- Access to Care
- Social Justice
- Inclusion
- Human Dignity
- Cultural Humility

Ethical Principles in Practice

Autonomy

Respecting patient values and preferences

Beneficence

Promoting patient well-being

Nonmaleficence

Reducing harm and suffering

Justice

Supporting fair and equitable treatment

Dignity

Honoring the inherent worth of every person

Chaplain Contributions to Ethical Decision-Making

- ✓ Values Clarification
- ✓ Spiritual Assessment
- ✓ Family Support
- ✓ Communication Facilitation

- ✓ Ethical Reflection
- ✓ Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- ✓ Compassionate Presence

A Simple Teaching Framework

- 1. Present the Case**
- 2. Identify Ethical Concerns**
- 3. Explore Patient Values**
- 4. Consider Spiritual Dimensions**
- 5. Discuss Interdisciplinary Responses**
- 6. Reflect and Apply Lessons**

Five Key Takeaways

1. Stories humanize ethics education.
2. Chaplaincy narratives strengthen ethical reasoning.
3. Dignity, spirituality, and health equity are essential to ethical practice.
4. Reflective practice deepens understanding and empathy.
5. Chaplaincy bridges ethical theory and real-world decision-making.

Final Reflection

“When learners encounter ethics through stories, ethical principles move from concepts on a page to realities in people's lives.”

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