

**Section:** Corporate- Administration

**Approved By:** Administrative Committee GUI.ALL.27130

**Approved On:** 5/31/19

**Document Status:** Current

**PURPOSE:**

Ethics consultations are a facilitated communication and educational processes that support ethical patient care, the integrity of health care providers, and the health care system. Ethics consultations can be provided for clinical or organizational issues, or a hybrid of these issues. Ethics consultations are available to all stakeholders who require assistance in resolving an ethical issue or making an ethical decision, including patients, family members, health care providers, physicians, residents, students, administrators, governors, and volunteers.

**POLICY STATEMENT:**

Depending on the situation, an ethics consultation may have one or more of the following objectives:

- To clarify the ethical issue(s) or question(s) and educate stakeholders about the ethical dimensions of the case;
- To facilitate communication between people involved in the case/situation and, where necessary, to help resolve conflict or disagreement;
- To assist in identifying alternative courses of action and, if appropriate, to provide recommendations for or against certain options;
- To facilitate an ethical decision-making process;
- To promote reflective practice;
- To help address moral discomfort or moral distress experienced by staff members and physicians;
- To enhance the capacity of stakeholders to identify ethical issues and use appropriate frameworks/approaches toward ethical decision-making. See Appendix C-1 and C-2 for the organization’s ethical decision-making framework tools.
- To propose, assist with, or lead, when appropriate, follow-up measures to ensure a more durable and proactive resolution to the ethical challenge identified; these measures can include debriefing sessions, educational rounds, or policy/guideline development.

The Ethicist shall be accountable to the VP Clinical and CNE, Ross Memorial Hospital, and the VP Practice, Academics & CNE, Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences.

**PROCEDURE:**

<b>ACCESS TO CONSULTATIONS</b>	
Requestor of	When an issue of ethical concern arises with respect to the care of an

<p>Consultation</p>	<p>individual patient or patients in general and when those who have made initial attempts to address the ethical issue(s) believe they could benefit from assistance in this area, a request for such assistance may be made to the Ethicist Consultation Service by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a patient;</li> <li>• a family member directly involved in the patient’s care;</li> <li>• the patient’s legal guardian;</li> <li>• a member of the health care team directly involved in the patient’s care</li> <li>• any physician, hospital staff member, governor, or volunteer concerned about an ethical issue related to clinical care or organizational practice</li> </ul> <p>Although individuals involved in the patient's care can refuse to participate in an ethics consultation, no one has the right to obstruct or interfere with the consultation process (i.e. by blocking access to the patient record or preventing others from requesting or participating in a consultation).</p> <p>The Regional Ethics Hub Ethicist operates under normal business hours (Monday to Friday, 0900-1700h). A request for an ethics consultation can be submitted by e-mail at <a href="mailto:ethics@rmh.org">ethics@rmh.org</a> , or by calling the Ethics Office at 705-324-6111 ext. 5131 Emergencies afterhours should be referred to the Manager on call.</p>
<p>Ethicist</p>	<p>After a consultation has been received, it will proceed in the following manner:</p> <p><b>Step 1: <u>Requesting the consultation.</u></b> This request will be received by the Ethics Consultation Service, and will be followed within 2 business days of receipt of the request, usually by phone. This follow-up will clarify from the individual requesting the consultation the reason for the request (i.e., the ethical question or issue) and the pertinent background information. Depending on the situation, this follow up may be done in person, over the phone, or through email. For consultations concerning a patient's care, the gathering of background information may involve speaking with others involved in the patient's care (e.g. staff, patient, family members) and reviewing the patient's health record.</p> <p><b>Step 2: <u>Determining the level of response required.</u></b> Consultations may be completed over the phone or via email for less complex or more factual questions, or they may require more active involvement (e.g. attending a committee meeting, family conference, or team meeting, speaking directly with the patient/family). In collaboration with the parties involved in the</p>

	<p>consultation, the Ethicist determines the appropriate response based on the complexity of the situation, the amount of additional information required, and the needs of the individual(s) requesting the consultation.</p> <p><b>Step 3: Consultation with others as appropriate.</b> To assist with the resolution of an ethical issue, the Ethicist may seek input from other professionals. These may include other Ross Memorial Hospital staff members, Regional Ethics Hub team members, Ethics Committee members from the strategic program involved, or colleagues from the University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics. Patient privacy and confidentiality will be maintained, unless required by law or Ross Memorial Hospital policy.</p> <p><b>Step 4: Ongoing involvement (if required) and follow-up.</b> Some situations may require ongoing ethics support, such as policy-related and organizational issues or complex clinical cases that evolve over time. For all consultations, effort will be made to follow up with those involved in the consult to record the outcomes and offer continued support.</p>
<b>NOTIFICATION</b>	
Ethicist	When a request for an ethics consultation is received directly from a patient and/or family member, notify the Most Responsible Physician, the Unit Manager or delegate to inform them of the consultation request.
<b>DOCUMENTATION</b>	
Ethicist	When a consultation involves direct patient/family contact, document in the patient's health record, or supply documentation that will be placed in the record by the Unit Manager.
Ethicist	Enter every consult into the Regional Ethics Hub Consultation Database for statistical monitoring of activities. This information is used to identify trends in the organization's ethical issues, challenges, and situations. The information will also be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee quarterly, or at their request. This committee reports to the Administrative Committee, and documented information will be used to improve the quality of services. Information entered in the database or presented to the Ethics Committee (or others) is de-identified and is meant to capture general activities and specific types of consult requests for the generation of departmental reports and does not contain personal health information.
<b>CONSULTATION FOLLOW-UP</b>	

Ethicist	<p>Depending on the nature of the ethics consultation, follow-up from the ethics consultation service may include one or more of the following services which the Ethicist can provide or support:</p> <p><u>Ethics Debriefing</u> When ethically challenging situations occur, members of the interdisciplinary team can be left with a sense of moral discomfort or distress. An ethics debriefing session provides both emotional and didactic support for those members of the care team involved in such situations. In particular, debriefings are intended to provide a morally open space for reflective dialogue, sharing of experience, and prospective problem solving. The goal is to increase participants' abilities and confidence in dealing with morally troubling situations, to provide an environment for frank discussion of those situations, and to provide the opportunity to plan effective management of similar situations in future. Ethics debriefing sessions are not the same as Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), which address all forms of distress following a critical/traumatic event, with primary focus on the psychological trauma.</p> <p><u>Ethics Education</u> A particular consultation may identify a need for an ethics education event, which can be designed to enhance ethics knowledge, decision-making skills, as well as, to help staff address similar ethical considerations that can arise in the future.</p> <p><u>Policy Review or Development</u> An ethics consultation can identify an organizational need for revision or development of a policy or guideline to support decision-making in similar situations.</p>
----------	--

<b>CONFIDENTIALITY</b>	
All Participants	<p>Confidentiality will be respected within the terms of the process outlined above, except as required by law or Ross Memorial Hospital policy. Additionally, through the Ethicist's association with the University of Toronto, Joint Centre for Bioethics, specific cases may be brought forward to the Clinical, Organizational and Research Ethics group for discussion. These discussions are conducted with a confidentiality agreement signed by all participants and only de-identified information is shared during this process.</p>