Module 4:
Ethical Issues in Palliative Care Nursing

Responding to Ethical Issues in Palliative Care

• Ethical dilemmas on macro and micro levels emerge daily in palliative care

Prince-Paul & Daly, 2010

Responding to Ethical Issues in Palliative Care

• Changes in social/family systems have added to complexity of end-of-life/palliative care
• Landmark cases influence legal/ethical history
• Palliative care nurses help patients make fully informed decisions
Ethics Competencies in Nursing

- Palliative care nurses play a critical role in legal/ethical issues
- Acquisition of knowledge, skill and core competencies for nurses
- Identification, evaluation, resolution of ethical issues

ANA, 2010

Standards of Professional Nursing Practice

- Scope of practice & standards of care
- Codes of ethical conduct
- Guidance for responsible end-of-life/palliative practice

Organizational Ethics

- Organizational ethics
- Ethics consultation
- Ethics committees
  - Education
  - Policy development
  - Case consultation
Ethical Principles

• Autonomy
• Beneficence
• Nonmaleficence
• Justice

Issues of Communication and Shared Decision Making

• Disclosure
• Confidentiality

Issues of Communication and Shared Decision Making, cont.

• Informed consent
• Decisional capacity
Issues of Communication and Shared Decision Making, cont.

• Decision making capacity for marginalized groups
  – Patients with dementia/mental illness
  – Patients with developmental disabilities
  – Prisoners

• Advance care planning
• Patient Self-Determination Act
• Advance directives

• Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care
• Court-appointed guardians
• Surrogate
Physicians Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)

- Standardized physician order form
- Specific types of life-sustaining treatment
- Applicable in life-limiting disease states
- A legal document and part of medical record
- Travels with the patient
- Honored across all care settings
- POLST or similar program in 32 states

California HealthCare Foundation, 2011; The California Coalition for Compassionate Care, n.d.

Ethical Issues in Palliative Care

- Prolongation of life: balancing benefits and burdens
- Withholding/withdrawing medical interventions
- DNR

Ethical Issues in Palliative Care, cont.

- Medical futility
- Assisted death
- Euthanasia
Ethical Issues in Palliative Care, cont.

- Principle of double effect - “Last Dose Syndrome”
- Research

Preventive Ethics

- Nurses should focus efforts on preventing the occurrence of conflicts
- Early identification of issues
- Knowledge of the natural history of many illnesses

Preventive Ethics (cont.)

- Understanding of patient/family wishes
- Cultural and spiritual assessment
- Communication skills
Facilitating Ethical and Legal Practice

The Four Box Method

Clinical Indications

- Indications for and against the intervention
- Reflects the goals of care
- Common ethical dilemmas

Patient Preferences

- An ongoing, dynamic process of assessment that decreases chance of conflict
- Cultural, ethnic and age related differences
- Common ethical dilemmas
**Quality of Life**

- Evaluation of prior QOL
- Expected QOL with and without treatment
- Common ethical dilemmas addressing QOL

**Contextual Features**

- Social, legal, economic and institutional circumstances
- Context features must be determined and assessed
- Common ethical dilemmas
Conclusion

• Ethical discernment, discourse, decision-making
• Address values and understanding of needs
• Advocate for patient/family rights
• Work closely with other disciplines