

West Haldimand General Hospital

# **ETHICS FRAMEWORK**

**APPROVED BY  
WEST HALDIMAND GENERAL HOSPITAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
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**Acknowledgements**

The West Haldimand General Hospital Ethics Committee has created this Ethics Framework based on the standardized document developed by Regional Ethics Network. The Committee is grateful for the excellent work done by other Canadian healthcare organizations, which triggered improvement in our own framework. We must acknowledge many outstanding resources that informed our work, including:

- Norfolk General Hospital Ethics Framework (2016)
- The Toronto Central Community Care Access Centre IDEA Framework (2008)
- Alberta Health Services “Ethics Framework: A Guide for AHS Staff, Physicians, and Volunteers” (2014)
- Hamilton Health Sciences Ethics Framework (2015)

## Introduction

Everything we do, either in our professional or personal life, has an ethical implication. Generally, people make decisions based on their individual values and beliefs. When choosing what is ethically acceptable, people consider the possible options and their consequences, based on the values and principles that are important in their lives. Similarly, healthcare organizations do not simply follow the existing rules; rather, they consider their own values and values of the people they serve, and potential harms and benefits for the patients.

West Haldimand General Hospital (WHGH), like other publicly funded organizations, has a specific set of ethical obligations towards their patients. As defined in the WHGH's [Mission, Vision, Values](#) the hospital has an ethical duty to do their best to relieve illness and suffering, and to help people live healthier lives. Ethical obligations also extend to the hospital personnel, so they can expect a safe and positive work environment. Further, WHGH has an obligation to be a responsible steward of public financial resources. In addition, the hospital's values (see below) outline what patients and their families should expect when getting care at WHGH:

- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Accountability
- ✓ Respect
- ✓ Excellence

WHGH has an [Organization Code of Ethics Policy](#) which applies to WHGH employees. The policy ensures that the values are brought to life in all aspects of hospital operations and strategic planning. More information about ethics related resources and activities can be found on the WHGH Staff E-Library.

## Key Terms

Throughout the Framework document, certain terms will be used repetitively, defined here:

*Clinical Ethics* - critical reflection on how to integrate values and morals into specific patient care decisions and practices

*Organizational Ethics* - critical reflection on the ethical dimensions of health care systems, management, processes (e.g. how to treat groups of patients)

*Research Ethics* - the ethics of the planning, conducting, and reporting of research at WHGH (including protection of human subjects; managing relationships between researchers and participants; conflicts of interest, management of data, reporting of findings, etc.)

*Ethics Framework* – organizational resources and processes that exist to support ethical decision-making

*Ethics Decision-Making Tool* – a document that supports structured approach to addressing ethical questions, regardless of where the question has occurred.

## Ethical Decision-Making Processes

The value-laden nature of healthcare results sometimes in highly charged conflict situations. Such situations often have significant consequences and result in ethical dilemmas. It is important to address both questions and signs of ethical issues:

### *QUESTIONS*

What should be done?  
Why should it be done?  
How should it be done?  
Who should do it?

### *SIGNS*

“Yuck factor”  
Moral uncertainty  
Conflict  
Competing “goods”, not right vs. wrong

WHGH is committed to an inclusive, transparent, and structured ethical decision-making process, keeping in mind that everyone may not be pleased with the final decision, but that everyone should feel they have been heard and their concerns have been taken into consideration.

WHGH has adopted IDEA Ethics Decision-Making Tool and a Ethical Decision Making Worksheet:

**I – Identify** the facts

**D – Determine** the ethical principles in conflict

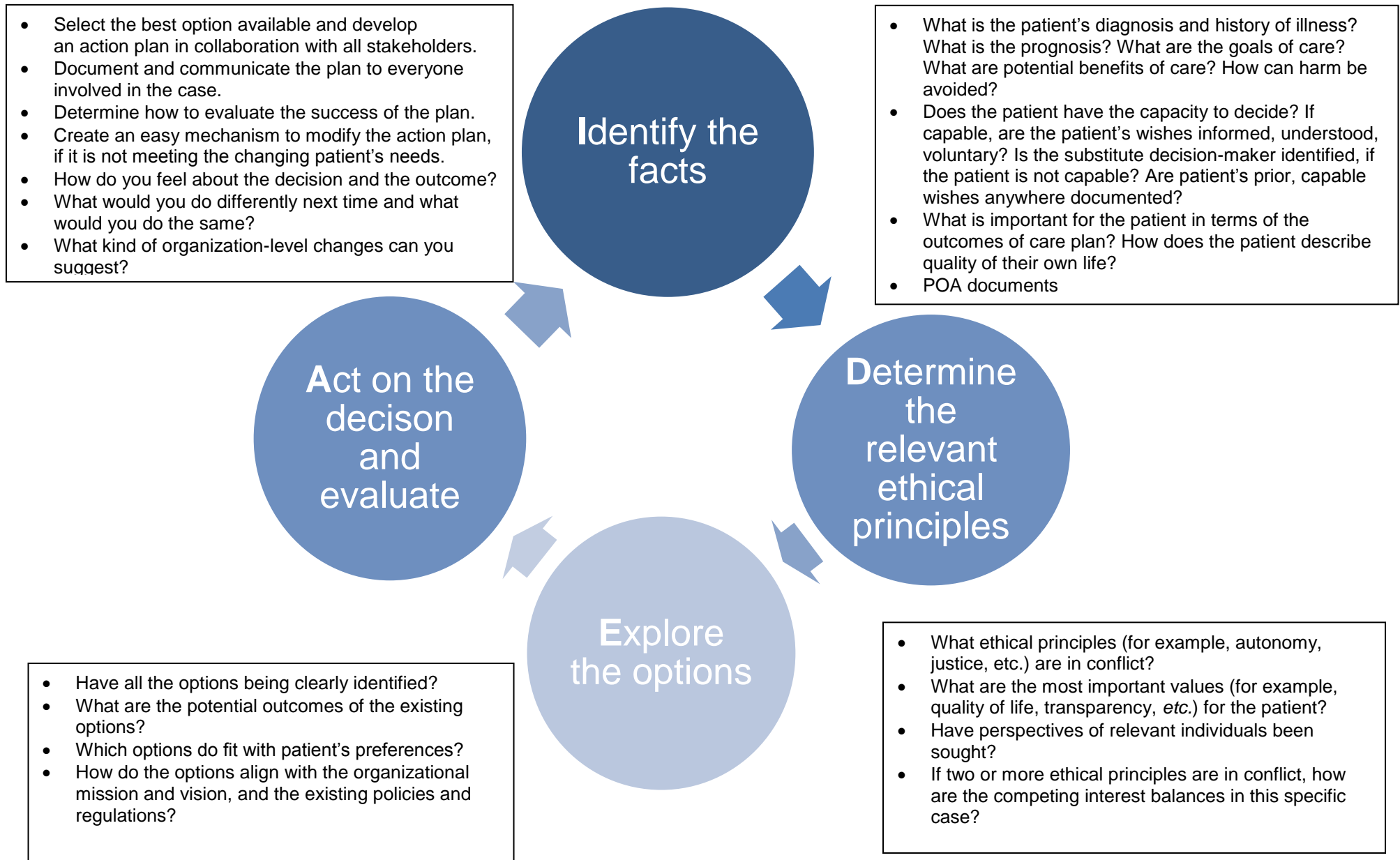
**E – Explore** options

**A – Act** on your decision and evaluate.

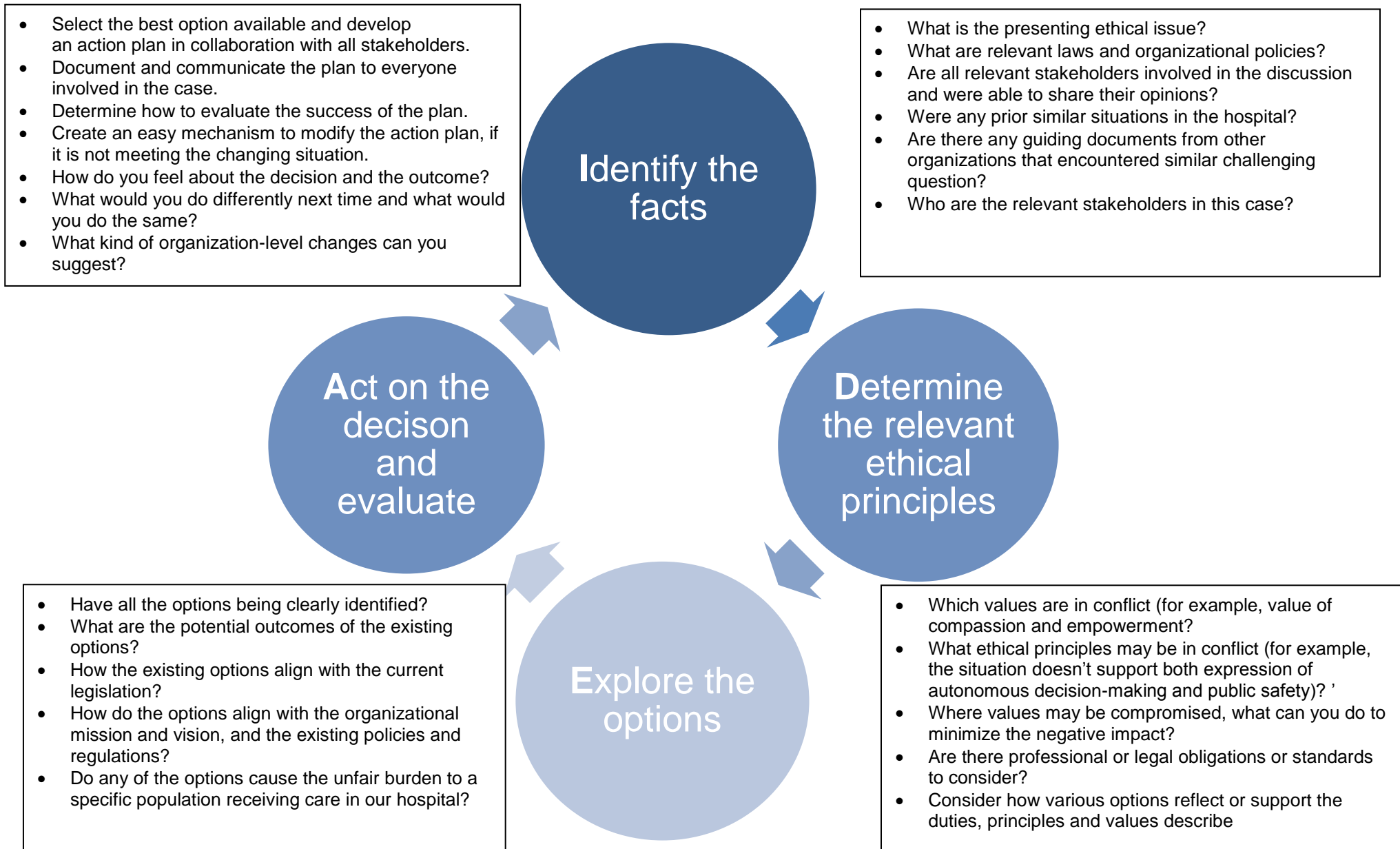
The worksheet is helpful in addressing both clinical and organizational ethical dilemmas (see pages 7-10 for more information).

A description of available ethics related resources in WHGH have been provided on page 11. After the ethical dilemma has been identified and IDEA Ethics Decision-Making Tool has been utilized and no answer is reached, additional services have been identified to address existing concerns or questions.

## IDEA Decision-Making Tool for CLINICAL Ethics Cases



## IDEA Decision-Making Tool for ORGANIZATIONAL Ethics Cases





## ETHICAL DECISION MAKING WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed as a tool to guide you through the process in dealing with an ethical issue

I – D – E – A

Information gathering & Describe situation



Explore options



Act on your decision & evaluation

### STEP 1: INFORMATION GATHERING & DESCRIBE SITUATION

#### A) Gather information/facts on the case

#### Consider:

- Re-state the details of the case
- What are the main issues or areas of concern/tension?
- Who are the individuals involved/who else needs to be involved?
- How does the client's history/prognosis affect his case?
- Are there other factors to consider, including company policies, directives, and regulation?

**STEP 1 cont...**

<p><b>B) Describe the different emotions</b></p>	<p><b>Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The emotions of : 1) the client, 2) family/others and 3) you</li><li>• Examine the emotional factors influencing each individual: (existing feelings, loyalties, values, biases, prior experiences)</li></ul> <p><b>Ask yourself:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do I feel about this particular client/family?</li><li>• How are my life experiences influencing my reaction?</li><li>• What are the family/cultural/societal traditions and customs that are influencing my reaction?</li></ul>
<p><b>C) Identify ethical issues (ie. what ethical principles are in conflict?)</b></p> <p><b>Principle</b>                                  <b>Explain the Issue</b></p>	<p><b>Consider:</b></p> <p>What ethical principles are involved?:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dignity</li><li>• Informed Choice &amp; Empowerment</li><li>• Commitment to Quality Services</li><li>• Fair &amp; Equitable Access</li><li>• Health &amp; Well Being</li><li>• Client Confidentiality</li><li>• Conflict of Interest</li><li>• Advocacy</li><li>• Relationship Among Providers</li><li>• Employee Safety</li></ul>



## STEP 2: EXPLORE OPTIONS & ANALYSE

D) Explore options and consider their strengths and weaknesses		
Option	Strengths	Weaknesses

**Consider:**  
Brainstorm & discuss options either alone or with peers. Remember to:

- Be creative and use your imagination
- Consider a compromise
- Predict the outcomes for each alternative
- Question whether the alternative fits with the client/family values
- Question whether the alternative meets the company policies, directives and regulations

**Seek help if necessary and consult with the person you report to.**

## STEP 3: ACT ON YOUR DECISION & EVALUATE

<p><b>E) Develop an action plan (Note: the actual plan should be <u>documented</u> in the chart).</b></p>	<p><b>Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given all the information that you have, <b>choose the best option available.</b></li> <li>• Develop an action plan</li> <li>• Present your suggested alternative and action plan to the client and those involved in such a way that it allows them to accept the plan</li> <li>• Re-examine the alternatives if other factors come to light, if the situation changes, or if an agreement cannot be reached</li> <li>• Determine when to evaluate the plan</li> <li>• Document and communicate the plan</li> </ul>
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**STEP 3 cont...**

<p><b>F) Evaluate the plan</b></p>	<p><b>Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What was the outcome of the plan?</li><li>• Are changes necessary?</li><li>• Document the evaluation</li></ul>
<p><b>G) Self-evaluate your decision</b></p>	<p><b>Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do you feel about the decision and the outcome?</li><li>• What would you do differently next time?</li><li>• What would you do the same?</li><li>• What have you learned about yourself?</li><li>• What have you learned about this decision-making process?</li></ul>

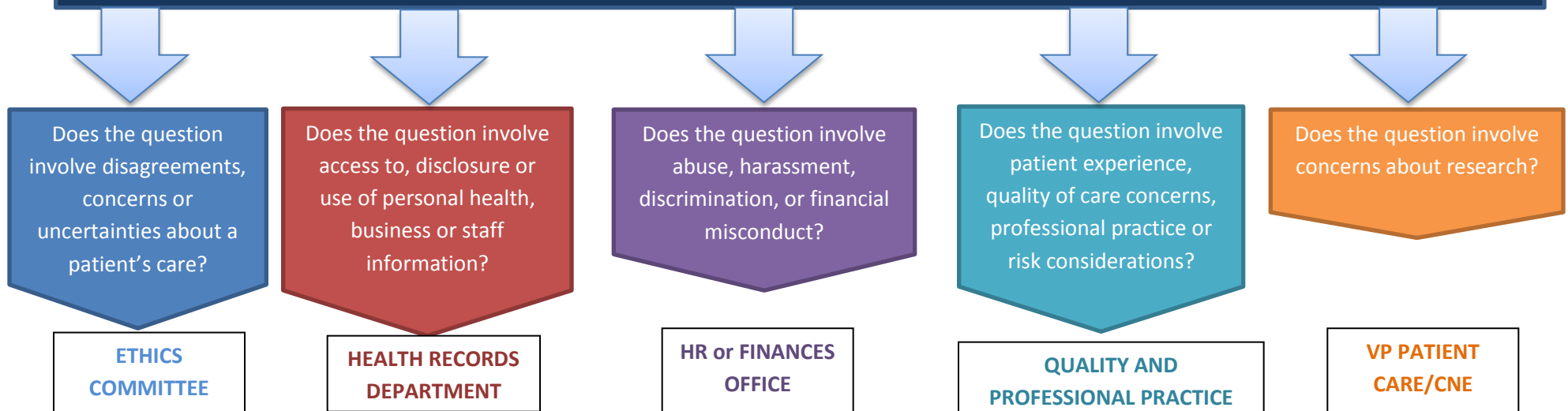
## Ethics Resources

### DO YOU HAVE AN ETHICS QUESTION?

- Are you wondering “What is the right thing to do?”
- Are you feeling caught between two or more obligations such as promoting respect for the patient’s choice and ensuring public safety?
- Do you use phrases like “it’s the patient’s right to...” or “it’s not fair that the patient doesn’t have access to...?”
- Do multiple options seem right or seem wrong?
- Are you concerned about how to protect others from harm?
- Is there no clear policy, law, or standard to guide decision-making?
- Would you describe yourself and others as feeling moral distress over an issue?

**Step 1:** Consult healthcare team and leadership, apply the IDEA Ethical Decision-Making Tool, and/or refer to appropriate policy.

**Step 2:** Contact the appropriate resource below. If you are still unsure whom to contact, please call the WHGH Switchboard at 905-768-3311 “0” and request the contact number for the Regional Ethicist



## Clinical Ethics Consultation

Healthcare teams, consisting of patients, families, staff, doctors, leaders and trainees, make ethical decisions related to patient care every day. Their decisions are guided by trying to answer the following questions:

- **What** should we do? (What actions are good or right?)
- **Why** should we do it? (Exploring the reasons for our decisions)
- **How** should the decision be made, and **who** should make it?

In some cases, the situation is so complex or there is a divide among the healthcare team members that requires assistance from an outside group. In WHGH, the health care team has an opportunity to contact the Ethics Committee for support and guidance. Any member of the health care team, including patients and families, may contact the Ethics Committee for support. Since WHGH is a founding member of the Regional Ethics Network, the Regional Ethicist supports the Ethics Committee in providing clinical ethics consultative support for the WHGH community.

Upon consulting among members of your healthcare team and trying to use the IDEA Framework, some difficult situations still may not be resolved. Common situations where the Ethics Committee can help include:

- Disagreements regarding the goals of care for a patient
- Uncertainty about how to make decisions for a patient who lacks capacity to make his/her own decisions
- Doubt regarding which particular treatments or options are best for patients

The Ethics Committee does not make decisions for others, but it helps the process of making ethical decisions by:

- Making clear the patient's goals, values, wishes, and best interests
- Discussing the facts of the situation with everyone involved to make sure that the issues, choices, and likely outcomes are clearly understood
- Exploring ethical values, principles, norms, policies, standards, and resources
- Mediating and resolving conflicts between parties
- Providing retrospective debriefing of difficult cases
- Providing specific education related to ethical situation and ethical decision making

Consultations can consist of a simple phone call or a series of meetings, depending on the complexity of the situation. Ethics Committee members and the Regional Ethicist respect the privacy of everyone involved, within legal limits.

You can access the Regional Ethicist by calling the Hospital Switchboard at 905-768-3311 ext. "0". The service is available Monday-Friday 8am - 5 pm. Should a matter need attention outside of these hours, please contact the administrator on-call.

## **Human Resources and Finances**

The WHGH Human Resources Department is a team which fosters an exceptional work environment and professional growth, which also has a mandate to manage complaints related to harassment and misconduct. Please contact the HR Department to address the following:

- If you believe you have experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment under the Ontario Human Rights Code;
- If you are experiencing a significant conflict in the workplace (including violation of the WHGH Organizational Code of Ethics).

Please contact the Manager of Human Resources at (905)768-3311 ext.1109.

The WHGH Finance Department ensures ethical stewardship over public resources, fosters an organizational culture which embraces honesty and integrity, and participates in fair purchasing and expense management. Please contact the Finances Department to address the following:

- Questions related to potential financial misconduct;
- Evaluation of internal costs;
- Fair advertising related to external contracting.

Please contact the Chief Financial Officer (519) 426-0750 ext. 6978.

## **Ethics of Quality & Clinical Practice**

If you have ethical dilemma related to quality of care, professional practice, patient experience or risk considerations, please contact the Office of Quality and Clinical Practice at (519) 426-0130 ext. 4611. The office is open Monday to Friday during regular business hours.

## **Privacy Ethics**

WHGH has a fundamental ethical obligation to protect personal health information during the course of care received here in hospital.

Part of mandate of the Health Records Department (Privacy Officer) is to be a resource for privacy issues and to:

- Facilitate compliance of WHGH and the governing board with legal requirements as identified in the Personal Health Information Protection Act of Ontario.
- Respond to inquiries or complaints from the public about WHGH information practices.

- Respond to inquiries from staff about WHGH information practices with respect to employment information.
- Respond to client's requests for access to or correction of health information that is under the ownership of WHGH.
- Ensure that all agents of WHGH are informed of their duties under the Personal Health Information Protection Act of Ontario through education and capacity-building.

If you have any additional questions related to privacy, please contact the Privacy Officer at (519) 426-0130 ext. 1475, Monday to Friday during business hours

## Research Ethics

Healthcare research may involve not just hospitalized patients, but also people seen in outpatient clinics and programs, their families and caregivers, as well as students, children, hospital volunteers, and people in the general community. Research on humans cannot take place without it being reviewed and considered safe by a group of people who are trained and experienced to do so.

WHGH is not involved in any original research as of now; however, we anticipate that the organization may be approached by external researchers. The external researchers will need to contact VP Patient Care/CNE to ensure that the research can be conducted within WHGH. The researchers will need to include Research Ethics Board approval, as well an estimate of what resources they would need from WHGH. WHGH VP/CNE will provide the approval for the research, after consultation with relevant stakeholders, such as Office of Privacy or Regional Ethicist. If you have questions related to research ethics please contact VP Patient Care/CNE at (519) 429-6979 during regular business hours.

## Professional Ethics

If none of the available WHGH resources are helpful to address your ethical dilemma and you are a member of a professional college or association, you may need to contact the respective organization to get more information. Here are some quick links for the professional colleges and organizations in Ontario:

[College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario](#)

[College of Dietitians of Ontario](#)

[College of Nurses of Ontario](#)

[College Of Occupational Therapists of Ontario](#)

[College of Physiotherapists of Ontario](#)

[College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario](#)  
[Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers](#)  
[Ontario College of Pharmacists](#)

Additional resources related to ethics and standards of practice are also listed here:

[Code of Ethics - College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario](#)  
[Code of Ethics – Ontario College of Physiotherapists](#)  
[Code of Ethics - College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario](#)  
[Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses - Canadian Nurses Association](#)  
[Code of Ethics of Dietetic Profession in Canada](#)  
[Code of Ethics - College of Nurses of Ontario - Ethics Resources](#)  
[College of Nurses of Ontario - Practice Standards - Ethics](#)  
[Canadian Public Relations Society – Code of Ethics](#)  
[Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario – Rules of Professional Conduct](#)

## **Ethics Policies**

WHGH has a number of policies to address a range of ethical issues. Here is a sample list of policies related to frequently encountered issue in healthcare. For a comprehensive list of policies, please access the WHGH e-library.

### **Ethics Policies Related To Direct Patient Care:**

III-P-159      [Privacy – Disclosure of Adverse Events](#)

III-C-171      [Consent to Treatment, Investigative Procedure, Operation or  
Administration of Blood or Blood products](#)

### **Organizational and Governance Policies:**

III-C-30              [Code of Conduct](#)

III-P-154            [Privacy – Protecting Personal Health Information](#)

III-H-78             [Workplace Violence, Bullying and Harassment Prevention](#)

III-E-20             [Ethics](#)

III-P-41             [Organization Code of Ethics](#)

III-P-83             [Code of Ethics](#)