

Framework for Ethical Decision-Making

Medical Indications

- What is the patient's medical problem? History? Diagnosis? Prognosis?
- Is the problem acute? Chronic? Critical? Emergent? Reversible?
- What are the goals of the treatment?
- What are the probabilities of success?
- What are plans in case of therapeutic failure?
- In sum, how can this patient be benefited by medical and nursing care, and how can harm be avoided?

Patient Preferences

- Is the patient mentally capable and legally competent? Is there evidence of incapacity?
- If competent, what is the patient stating about preferences for treatment?
- Has the patient been informed of benefits and risks, understood this information and given consent?
- If incapacitated, who is the appropriate surrogate (SDM)? Is the SDM using appropriate standards for decision-making?
- Has the patient expressed prior preferences, e.g., advance directives?
- Is the patient unwilling or unable to cooperate with medical treatment? If so, why?
- In sum, is the patient's right to choose being respected to the extent possible in ethics and law?

Situation

Background

Assessment

Recommendation

- Identify the problem – specific concise statement
- What are the values involved
- Are there other cases or significant data that needs to be considered
- Legal and organizational requirements considered
- Weigh the benefits and burdens
- Conclusion and decision statement

Quality of Life

- What are the prospects, with or without treatment, for a return to normal life?
- What physical, mental and social deficits is the patient likely to experience if treatment succeeds?
- Are there biases that might prejudice the provider's evaluation of the patient's quality of life?
- Is the patient's present or future condition such that his or her continued life might be judged undesirable?
- Is there any plan and rationale to forgo treatment?
- Are there plans for comfort and palliative care?

Contextual Features

- Are there family issues that might influence the decisions?
- Are there provider (physicians, nurses or others) issues that might influence the decisions?
- Are there financial and economic factors?
- Are there religious or cultural factors?
- Are there limits on confidentiality?
- Are there problems or allocation of resources?
- How does the law affect treatment decision?
- Is clinical research or teaching involved?
- Is there any conflict of interest on the part of the providers or the institution?