NAF Professional Ethics

Lesson 10

Ethics in Industry

Teacher Resources

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Teacher Resource 10.1

Ethical Perspectives: Health Care Industry

Ethics in the health care industry is extremely complex and growing more so all the time. Technology, biotechnology, stem cell research, new drug discoveries, an aging population, and changes in society mean that we face ethical challenges nobody could have imagined even 20 years ago. You can even major in medical ethics or bioethics today.

The Greek physician Hippocrates, who lived in the 5th century BCE, wrote The Hippocratic Oath. It is one of the oldest binding documents in history. Throughout the centuries, doctors have taken this oath. It is based on the values of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy. Modern versions have been created that better reflect the realities of medical practice today, but these four concepts remain the mainstay of ethics in health care.

Beneficence

Beneficence is action that is done for the benefit of others. Beneficent actions improve the situation for others, or they can help prevent or remove harms. Care is at the core of beneficence, and health care providers are expected to take actions that care for and are in the best interest of the patient. Beneficence is central to ethics in medicine. Since the goal of medicine is to promote the welfare of patients, doctors have an obligation to treat ailments, protect and defend the rights of others, rescue people in danger, and help people with disabilities. Examples of beneficent actions include upholding a high standard of care and encouraging a healthy lifestyle, such as informing patients about the dangers of smoking and helping them quit. Providing vaccinations is another example. Beneficent actions also include responding to medical emergencies; for example, resuscitating a drowning person or heart attack victim.

Non-Maleficence

*Non-maleficence* means to do no harm. Physicians must refrain from providing ineffective treatments or treating patients with malice (the desire to do wrong or evil). Examples of non-maleficent actions are stopping a medication that is shown to be harmful or of no benefit, and refusing to provide treatment that has been shown not to work. In practical terms, this principle has become less useful than it used to be, because many beneficial therapies have serious risks. The real ethical issue is whether the benefits outweigh the potential for harm. So, the principle of non-maleficence is most useful when risks and benefits must be balanced in decision making. Ultimately, it is the patient who decides whether the benefits outweigh the risks of a particular medical action. Non-maleficence, however, plays a central role in questions surrounding end-of-life care. It helps with making decisions about both passive and active euthanasia. An example of passive euthanasia is pulling the plug on machines that are keeping the patient alive. Another term for active euthanasia is *doctor-assisted suicide*. In questions of when to end life-sustaining treatments, to issue orders not to resuscitate the patient, or to assist patients in extreme terminal pain to end their lives by active means, the central ethical dilemma for the physician is the commitment to non-maleficence.

Autonomy

*Autonomy* means free of control or influence. In health care ethics, it means that a person can act of his or her own free will, without being controlled or interfered with; that he or she can make decisions independently. Autonomy is a key concept in medical ethics. Doctors are obligated to create the conditions necessary for patients to act with autonomy. This means that they educate the patient to understand the situation by informing them of the benefits and risks involved in the delivery of their health care. They calm emotions and address fears that get in the way of the patient making a reasoned decision. They counsel patients who want to make choices that harm their health and well-being and try to persuade them against these choices while respecting their right to choose. Autonomy also includes respect for a patient’s privacy and getting consent from the patient before providing medical treatment.

Sometimes health care professionals are in a situation where beneficence conflicts with autonomy. For example, a patient who has just had bypass surgery still wants to keep smoking. The action that best respects the patient’s autonomy would be to let the patient decide for herself, but this is difficult given the commitment to beneficence and non-maleficence. If the patient is in his or her right mind and understands the consequences of each choice, then the doctor must respect the patient’s decision while continuing to advise the patient to make a wiser one. Like conflicts between autonomy and beneficence, conflicts between autonomy and non-maleficence also exist. There are times when patients may ask their health care practitioner to assist them in ending their life. Such autonomous requests place the practitioner in a dilemma between the fully informed wishes of the patient and the practitioner’s commitment to do no harm, highlighting the conflict between autonomy and non-maleficence.

In addition to instances such as these, where the autonomous choice of the patient may do harm to that patient, autonomy presents particular challenges precisely because it is something that can be lost. For instance, in cases where an elderly person is suffering from dementia, we generally think that they have lost the ability to think rationally, and so have lost the necessary elements for autonomy. Physicians face dilemmas in cases such as these; for example, when a patient suffering from dementia exercises his will, yet requests something that violates the physician’s commitment to beneficence and non-maleficence. Autonomy can be said to exist as a matter of degrees, which complicates the physician’s commitment.

Justice

There are two ways that health care professionals must abide by the principle of justice. The first is to treat patients with similar health situations in the same way, and to allocate resources justly, or fairly. If there aren’t enough resources, the practitioner should do what is most cost-effective. The second is to be fair and just when making decisions for patients. For example, the way patients appeal rulings by insurance companies has to be fair, and the allocation of transplant organs must also be fair and just. This is one reason why we do not allow for the buying and selling of organs. We have a lottery system based upon need. It is also why in emergencies, patients are categorized and treated on a triage-based system, a system that prioritizes based upon the severity of the condition. If you’re waiting in the emergency room because you sprained your wrist and someone arrives with a heart attack, the person with the heart attack has a much more severe condition than you do, and you may have to wait a while.

Other ethical considerations that are especially important in health care:

**Informed consent.** This means the patient is given the information necessary to understand the benefits and risks of a particular course of action in order to make the best decision possible.

**Confidentiality.** Physicians are ethically bound to keep to themselves information that a patient conveys. Confidentiality gives the patient confidence in sharing sensitive information and personal details, which the physician needs to know in order to offer the best health care for that particular patient. Confidentiality inspires trust, and patients are more likely to seek care when they need it. It gives doctors a chance to discuss sensitive topics with the patient, and it prevents harm. For example, a pregnant patient is more likely to disclose that she has been using drugs if she is certain that the doctor abides by confidentiality.

There are some circumstances in which the ethical thing to do is to breach, or break, confidentiality. Examples include cases of child abuse or domestic violence, injuries caused by weapons, and violence caused by psychiatric patients.

**Ethics and the welfare of health care practitioners.** Doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals hold highly stressful jobs. They interact with people in their most vulnerable state. People’s lives are literally in their hands. At times, health care professionals can be subject to abuse by patients or by patients’ family members who are frustrated with their condition or care. They can be threatened by people who are suffering from drug abuse or psychiatric disorders and must ensure their own security and safety above all else. In addition to this, their long work hours are infamous. The result is a high rate of burnout—in some specialties, it is as high as 50%! When health care professionals become exhausted, detach from caring about their patients, and grow less and less efficient, they are exhibiting three serious symptoms of burnout. This situation puts patients at risk.

Health care professionals are also exposed to disturbing, and sometimes gruesome, scenes of trauma or abuse that can have lasting psychological effects. Like other emergency personnel, health care practitioners can be affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can impact not only them personally, but also their families, friends, and patients.

Recent research shows burnout is more likely, and worse, when there is a mismatch between the health care professional’s ethics and the ethics of the organization he or she works for. As in other industries, shared values are important for a person’s sense of purpose and morale.

Teacher Resource 10.2

Ethical Perspectives: Hospitality and Tourism Industry

The hospitality and tourism industry has specific ethical characteristics that are quite different from, say, the field of education or the agriculture industry. These characteristics are staying fairly constant, even though the industry itself is changing in some fundamental ways.

These ethics characteristics are also becoming more of a focus. In the past, hospitality and tourism businesses depended on a few reliable tricks to stay ahead of the competition: lowering prices, developing better products, selling more skillfully, and providing more services. Now they need more strategies to attract and retain customers. The new approach is to create a stronger relationship with customers, and much of the conversation around this new approach focuses on ethics.

Honesty

Of course, honesty is the cornerstone of ethics in any industry or personal philosophy. But it occupies a special place in hospitality and tourism, because there are so many opportunities to cheat and steal. Cash transactions between customers and employees, access to tourists’ hotel rooms, and guests not knowing if they’ve been quoted the right price all make it very easy to do the wrong thing. To fight temptation, hospitality and tourism businesses actively discuss and model honesty. They strive to establish trust in-house as well as with customers.

Inclusiveness

The hospitality and tourism industry may be the most diverse industry of all. Tourists come from everywhere on the planet, and the people who work in this industry do too. People who work in hospitality and tourism must be inclusive and accepting of people very different from themselves. Employees have to work with people of varying ethnicities, cultures, and ages. Thus a tolerance and acceptance of diversity is a key ethical characteristic.

Customers and employees constantly face tempting situations that attract abuse. Managers constantly face situations where they have to decide what is ethically right—a decision made trickier by the multicultural, highly diverse nature of people in the business. Problems include discrimination, harassment, and theft.

Responsiveness

This characteristic is ethical in the hospitality and tourism industry because it means that people respond to the person or situation in the most constructive way, rather than alienating people through rigid responses and inflexible attitudes. In any given day the manager of a restaurant or hotel is barraged with last-minute problems. A server doesn’t show up for his or her shift. The delivery of clean sheets and towels got dropped off at the wrong hotel. There is an argument over the distribution of tips. A customer is complaining about the air-conditioning. These problems all might present themselves at once! A manager has to be flexible, able to change focus and plans whenever required. He or she has to be able to manage a diverse workforce, encountering a diverse set of challenges on a daily basis. Management must reflect on their daily decisions and on their behavior toward business partners and clients.

And everyone on that workforce has to be flexible as well, from the waitperson who has to cover two areas of the restaurant because her colleague’s car broke down on the freeway, to the housekeeping staff who suddenly have to prepare six rooms for a last-minute group of businesspeople. They must be able to respond to situations in a professional manner, and with an eye to ensuring that the customer is as little affected by the situation as possible.

Social Responsibility

*Social responsibility* means operating in an environmentally conscious way. It also means being sensitive to the people who live in the area around the hospitality and tourism business. In the past, and often today, the usual practice was to ignore both the environment and the host community and instead focus on making as much profit as possible. Slowly change is coming about. For one thing, doing business as usual is bad for profits over the long term. Polluting, overbuilding, and ignoring the needs of the host community create a place that nobody wants to visit. They also create a situation where prostitution, alcohol abuse, drugs, and crime flourish. The key players in the tourism industry can grow their businesses in ways that preserve the environment and create positive relationships with the people who live in the tourist area.

Being socially responsible is becoming more and more important to tourists anyway. But operating in a socially responsible way also:

* Increases profits
* Improves public image
* Improves employee relations

Social responsibility also refers to the practice of giving back to the community. This is both the ethical thing to do and a great way to earn the respect and loyalty of customers. Social responsibility options are limitless! The Four Seasons Hotel corporation, for example, funds everything from planting trees to cancer research.

Safety of Environmental Conditions

Food safety and cleanliness are ethical concerns for two reasons: One, they protect customers. Without them, customers can become extremely ill or even die from food poisoning. Two, food safety reminds a business that customer well-being is more important than profit. Otherwise, a manager can be tempted to sell food that is past its expiration date, or food that has become contaminated. In many places, public health officials will do spot checks and scheduled inspections to ensure that kitchens are clean and that good food-handling practices are being used.

Likewise, ensuring a clean space for overnight guests is crucial to the success of businesses in the hospitality sector. Hotel rooms can be occupied seven nights a week with seven different people, from seven different countries from around the world. Employees and managers must ensure that the rooms have been cleaned between customers, with sheets changed and bathrooms disinfected. These tasks are a matter of health and safety for the employees and, most importantly, the incoming guest. Customers place an enormous amount of trust in the fact that a hotel has created a safe place for something as intimate as sleeping. Management and employees must constantly monitor beds for bed bugs and take the appropriate steps to fumigate when necessary, for instance. Customers trust that the pillow they rest their head on will not send them home with an unwelcome guest.

The Case for Ethical Practice

Studies have shown that hospitality and tourism employees require a higher ethical perception than employees in other industries, and a stronger capacity to judge ethical issues using the policies of the organization. The hospitality industry is purely a service industry: they serve guests in the most intimate of ways, by offering the comforts of a meal and a roof over one’s head. Rooted in the very history of the hospitality industry, and the nature of service in general, are the virtues of being courteous, considerate, respectful, mannerly, congenial or friendly, and sociable. What it means to be good in the hospitality industry is at its core the embodiment of virtuous character, and yet many companies still think that ethical practices hurt profitability. In truth, a reputation for ethical integrity has a long-term positive impact on profits. In other words, hospitality and tourism companies can attract and keep customers by behaving ethically. A reputation for ethical practices:

* Attracts and keeps customers
* Contributes to productivity by minimizing the cost of business transactions
* Creates trust with suppliers and consumers
* Reduces employee turnover

Ethical workplaces attract and retain quality workers because their values are in sync with the employees’ values. Turnover is directly related to the ethical environment. If the environment is ethical, it:

* Reduces stress
* Increases trust
* Reduces conflict
* Increases satisfaction
* Causes employees to try harder to please customers

Codes of Ethics

A code of ethics helps to unify an organization’s approach to ethics. It shows which values are the most important. All new hires should receive their company’s code of ethics and receive training in ethics as well. A code of ethics also helps with decision making when an employee is confronted with an ethical dilemma. Here is the statement of ethical culture from the Four Seasons; the statement is then described in full for every aspect of the business:

Four Seasons is committed to conducting business in a manner that complies with applicable laws and is—and is perceived to be—consistent with the highest ethical standards, including standards intended to prevent bribery and corruption. Four Seasons is committed to understanding the risks that may compromise these standards and using all reasonable efforts to ensure that those who provide services to and for Four Seasons—including employees, contractors and agents—are aware of and share our commitment to an ethical and anti-bribery culture.

Some of the industry-specific training for new employees can also incorporate virtues of ethical character and virtues central to the practice of hospitality, without the training necessarily being called a code of ethics. By incorporating such virtues into the very basic training for hospitality employees, the industry can help weave ethics into its operations and produce employees capable of offering a better product to consumers. Ethics can, at times, be most effective when seen not as an added layer to worry about, but as something integral, and at the very core of industry practice. Ethical service is good service.

Teacher Resource 10.3

Ethical Perspectives: Finance Industry

Ethics are critical in the finance industry, which connects every person and business in an economy. Ethical practices protect the consumer, financial businesses, and the economy as a whole. Characteristics of ethical practice in the finance industry focus on the following concepts.

Transparency

*Transparency* means that investors and stakeholders have access to information about how a public company operates and what its assets and liabilities are. It is absolutely essential for ensuring honesty in transactions, and it helps to inform both actual and potential shareholders about the health of the corporation. Lack of transparency was a key element in the financial crisis of 2008. As a reaction to the crisis, government legislation changed the way companies must report their financial statements. It especially changed the valuation of assets, auditing practices, and the level of detail required in the corporations’ reporting practices. For example, corporations must now provide more detail in certain communications for example. This is called **full disclosure.**

Corruption can occur when there is a lack of transparency, when people don’t know or don’t disclose the financial facts. Here is the Ring of Gyges story in modern times: when financiers keep information hidden, they can use it for personal gain. Thus many rules and regulations are in place to ensure transparency, as well as serious consequences when it is not honored.

Compliance

Perhaps more than other industries, compliance is extremely important for ethical practice in the finance industry. Financial companies must abide by many rules and regulations, all of which keep them honest and protect the public’s money. Certified public accountants (CPAs) undergo training and must pass exams so that they fully understand the formal code of ethics they must comply with. Compliance is important not only for the companies operating in this industry, but also for society. The financial services industry as a whole is the industry most closely tied to the overall welfare of a society. Financial services are a necessary function of any modern society, and are involved in every aspect of the economy. When it fails to comply with regulations, it jeopardizes national and international economic and financial stability. Its importance in this way makes it totally different from any other industry. The 2008 financial crisis showed us what can happen. Adhering to ethical and regulatory standards in this industry is therefore imperative not only for the sake of individual firms, but also for society as a whole.

The Ethics of Hierarchy

The finance industry is hierarchical. Employees work for middle managers, who in turn work for upper management, who in turn answer to the head of the company. The company head must work with upper management to set ethical standards and then lead by example. Middle management must do the same for employees. Expectations should be transparent at every level, and the law must be applied in the same way to everyone.

At higher levels of the hierarchy, however, the consequences for unethical behavior have a bigger impact than at the bottom. If a CEO is caught in a scandal such as having an affair with a lower-ranking person in the company, then his or her job is more at risk than a bank teller’s would be in the same situation. And when something unethical happens at lower levels, management shares the blame even if they had no knowledge of what was going on. Management shares in the responsibility when things go wrong. They may have failed to address a situation, to put safeguards in place, to model ethical behavior, or to ask the right questions. So the more senior you are in a company, the more responsibility you shoulder for your own actions and for the actions of those below you.

Ethical Trends in Finance

An argument against ethics in finance goes like this: The pursuit of profit in a free-market economy will benefit society, so business ethics aren’t necessary. Another argument is that managers must be loyal to their companies, regardless of ethics. A third is that obeying the law is the same thing as behaving ethically. But these are very short-term positions, and tend to ignore the long-term impacts of acting unethically. The tide is turning, however, in light of the incredible breaches in ethics that are exposed so frequently. The fall of seemingly untouchable giant financial companies proves that no business can survive without ethics. Ethics apply to everyone and to everything they do. And it’s a myth that ethical behavior diminishes profits. They increase them over time, because trust builds, and that trust fosters financial activity and decreases transaction costs.

Up until recently, investors just wanted to see their money grow, and most people didn’t think too much about how that happened. We know so much more about the ramifications of our investments and the serious social, economic harm that can come from risky complex behavior that public opinion is changing about how to invest. It is an ethical matter for most people today.

The growing concern for ethics in the people the finance industry serves is another incentive for the finance industry to engage in ethical practices.

Teacher Resource 10.4

Ethical Perspectives: Information Technology Industry

As a rapidly evolving industry that affects every person and company every day, information technology has a unique set of ethical characteristics. Four main ethical areas are:

* Integrity of records
* Privacy
* Intellectual Property

Integrity of Records

Data is meaningless if it has been altered or tampered with. **Information integrity** is the assurance that this hasn’t happened, that the records being accessed have not been altered, damaged, or otherwise tampered with. They are exactly as the author intended them. So an essential ethical principle in information technology is integrity of records or information. We must trust that the records kept electronically, that we all depend upon, are valid and correct.

Integrity of records is so critical that some professions employ document integrity specialists. Their job is to make sure that the information in a document is what it purports to be. Law firms and health care organizations have the most need for this kind of proof, as do, to a lesser extent, accountants. But because there has been illegal manipulation of data, new laws and regulations have been instituted. In addition, every IT organization has to create its own requirements and controls to ensure integrity of records, especially since data is managed and processed in so many different ways. In the cloud, unauthorized users can access data and wreak havoc, for example.

There are five areas to focus on to ensure integrity of records:

1. The organization’s policies and procedures need to be correct and complied with.
2. Comprehensive training must be provided to anyone interacting with the system.
3. The data within a system has to be reliably created and maintained.
4. The system must have a good audit trail, appropriate logs, and a system of audit to test that documentation.
5. The algorithms and processes that act upon the data and the overall computing environment must be reliable.

Privacy

The ethics of privacy in information technology are in a state of flux. Technology is changing so fast, laws can’t keep up. Our digital footprints are being analyzed in ways we can’t even imagine. “Digital breadcrumbs” that we drop every time we go online are combined to create profiles that are circulated and used to make decisions about us. Researchers are using what we buy, the sites we visit, and what we post to learn all about us. Our privacy is being violated in ways that do not constitute breaking any law, but in ways that we often do not appreciate or at times understand. Data on us is being kept not only in government databases, but increasingly in the databases of companies who then sell this data to different firms. Often users are unaware not only that their data is collected, but also that the company that requested their information—a company they may have trusted—intends to sell this information.

The European Union (EU) believes that respect for human dignity can be the key ethical principle to guide new ways to manage privacy. The dignity of the human person is a fundamental right and a foundation for other rights, such as the rights to privacy and protection of personal data.

Systems and software engineers should be applying the principles of privacy-by-design in new products and services, to start getting ahead of a very serious privacy issue. Engineering solutions should enable people who want to preserve their privacy and anonymity. It should be possible to keep identities private when data is being aggregated and analyzed.

Intellectual Property

Ownership, or intellectual property, is an important ethical issue in information technology, particularly in software development. In fact, it sharply divides the software development community, who have very different perspectives on the ethics involved. There are two camps: the free software community, and the software-should-be-owned community.

The free software camp believes that it is ethical to keep software from being treated as intellectual property. They feel that everyone should be able to use software in any way that is socially useful. They think people should be free to study the software by viewing the source code, to redistribute it, to change it and release those changes for free, and to run the software.

The other side of the coin is selling your software and getting paid for your work. This ethical stance is also valid, so the battle rages on.

Codes of Ethics

A code of ethics helps to unify an organization’s approach to ethics. It shows which values are the most important. All new hires should receive their company’s code of ethics and receive training in ethics as well. A code of ethics also helps with decision making when an employee is confronted with an ethical dilemma.

The Computer Ethics Institute provides an example of a code of ethics that addresses the most important ethical practices for the information technology industry:

1. Thou shalt not interfere with the works and files of other people.
2. Thou shalt not sneak around in other people’s computer files.
3. Thou shalt not use a computer to steal and do negative things.
4. Thou shalt not use a computer to bear false witness.
5. Thou shalt not copy or use proprietary software for which you have not paid.
6. Thou shalt not use other people’s computer resources with no authorization or proper compensation.
7. Thou shalt not appropriate other people’s intellectual output.
8. Thou shalt think about the social consequences of the program you are writing or the system you are designing.
9. Thou shalt not use a computer to harm other people.
10. Thou shalt always use a computer in ways that ensure consideration and respect for your fellow humans.

Teacher Resource 10.5

Rubric: Ethics in Our Industry Infographic

Student Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  | Exemplary | Solid | Developing | Needs Attention |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Creativity** | Assignment shows tremendous creativity and contains unique, imaginative ideas. It’s clear that much thought and effort went into innovation. | Assignment demonstrates creativity and unique ideas. Effort clearly went into creating a unique and imaginative project. | Assignment demonstrates little creativity, and minimal effort was put into creating a unique or innovative project. | Assignment shows almost no creativity, unique ideas, or time and effort. |
| **Information** | Information about ethics in this industry is conveyed in an interesting, clear way. | Information about ethics in this industry is clearly conveyed. | Information about ethics in this industry is somewhat vague. | Information about ethics in this industry is confusing or inaccurate. |
| **Content Organization** | Content is clearly organized, with a logical flow of connected ideas. | Content is organized, and most ideas are logically connected. | Ideas are sound, but the content is not well organized. | Content is extremely disorganized. The connections between ideas are unclear or  nonexistent. |
| **Labels and Titles** | Labels and titles are concise and clearly fit the content. | Labels and titles are somewhat concise and fit the content. | Labels and titles are somewhat vague and do not fit the content. | Labels and titles are all confusing and do not fit the content. |
| **Mechanics** | No grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors. All sentences are well constructed and vary in structure. | Few grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors. Most sentences are well constructed, with some variation in sentence structure. | Some grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors. Most sentences are well constructed, with little variation in sentence structure. | Many grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors. Most sentences are poorly constructed. |

Additional Comments:

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Teacher Resource 10.6

Key Vocabulary: Ethics in Industry

| Term | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| beneficence | Action taken for the benefit of others; a key principle in health care ethics. |
| compliance | Acting in accordance with rules and regulations. |
| confidentiality | Keeping information that someone has shared private. A physician must keep information shared by a patient confidential. |
| full disclosure | Providing all information to investors in a company. |
| infographic | An image that represents information or data in visual form. |
| information integrity | The assurance that data has not been tampered with in any way and that it has not been altered or damaged through a system error. |
| informed consent | Providing enough information about benefits and risks of a particular course of action so that the person affected can make a decision based on knowledge and reason. |
| justice | In health care, to treat patients in similar circumstances similarly, to allocate resources fairly, and to ensure that patient procedures are fair. |
| non-maleficence | To do no harm; a key principle in health care ethics. |
| transparency | A condition in which investors and stakeholders have access to information about how a company operates and what its assets are. |