Mid North Coast Rural Palliative Care Project – Link Nurse Education 2004

Ethical-Legal Frame

Principles

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Ethical Dimensions of Palliative Care for the Elderly

Definitions

Ethics - morals and values - what we ought to do according to the philosophy of our society and culture - goodness and badness

Law - dictates what we must do according to the way society is organised and controlled

Principle Ethics

- To guide professional purpose and conditions of practice
- To cure or palliate
- To care
- To be trustworthy
- To be diligent
- To protect the vulnerable

Legal Issues

- Duty of care
- Power of Attorney – *Advance Care Directives*
- Informed consent
- Workplace Health and Safety

Ethical Principles

- Respect for Autonomy
- Beneficence
- Non-maleficence
- Justice
- Veracity

Assumptions of Principle Ethics

Individual Based on Western philosophy and cultural values

- Liberty
- Self-governance & freedom from - oppressive regime or interference of others
- Mental incapacity which prevents meaningful choices

Ethical Dilemmas

Difficult moral problem that involves two or more mutually exclusive morally correct courses of action

Respect for Autonomy

- Individual's right to be self-determining
- Informed free of coercion
- Liberty to make choices

Dilemmas

- The rights of cognitively impaired client
- Individual versus organisational rights

Beneficence

- Duty to care and to do good
- Prevent harm, or evil
- Promote good – trust and truthfulness
- Advocacy

Dilemma

- Individual versus organisational advocacy

Non-maleficence

- Above all do no harm
- Remove harm
- Protective environment (WPHS)
- Protect the vulnerable – advocacy
- Benefits versus harm of interventions

Justice

- Distributive justice
- Duty of universal fairness and equity
- Avoid discrimination on the basis of difference
- Professional action should in principle be universal for all people in our care

Justice Dilemmas

- Distribution of resource:
  - funding
  - time
  - staff mix
  - choices available: treatment options, place of death

Veracity

- Truth telling
- Phases of transition to palliative approach
- Engaging client group in decision making
- Prognosis
- Basis of effective communication

Dilemma

- The truth versus beneficence

Principles of Double Effect

Issues in Palliative Care

- Hydration versus dehydration
- Relief of suffering versus untoward effects of palliative treatment, eg. sedation, *last injection syndrome*

Antithesis of palliative care ethics is euthanasia

Ethical Issues in Practice

Therapeutic relationships – phases

- Paternalistic model
- Instructional
- Deliberative
- Situational

Ethical Issues

- Knowledge is power!
- Communication
  - giving and listening
  - care and respect
- Valuing difference
- Cultural competency

Summary

- The ethical practitioner respects life and promotes quality of the client's remaining life time by protecting their rights, advocating as and when required, and providing a protective environment for the vulnerable

References

1. Matzo, M. and Sherman, D. (Eds.). (2004). Gerontologic Palliative Care Nursing, St Louis Missouri, Mosby.