

Introduction

HEALTHCARE EXECUTIVES ENCOUNTER ethical challenges that require a decision or an action every day. Ethical decisions involve making the right choice in the face of competing values and options—determining what decision, action, or behavior is best when there is conflict or uncertainty. Executives and managers often struggle to make the right choice. It's seldom easy. Executives' responses to competing values reflect on their leadership and on the organization. Ethical decision making can be complex and challenging and can present significant personal and organizational ramifications.

Every component of the healthcare delivery system is under intense pressure to acknowledge its deficits and accelerate its improvement efforts. Consequently, healthcare executives are being held more accountable; increased transparency is expected and demanded; access, quality, and cost metrics are routinely compared; and resource allocation decisions are under greater scrutiny. If we can respond creatively, effectively, and ethically in this environment, not only will our institutions, patients, and staff be better served, but so will our communities. Ethics is a central foundation of a high-quality organizational culture.

Not surprisingly, there is no comprehensive ethical cookbook with recipes for addressing every potential conflict. But we can draw

selectively from the extensive and expanding organizational and clinical ethics literature for assistance. By capitalizing on the insights of professionals who have dealt with these frequently overlapping areas of clinical and organizational ethics, executives will more successfully anticipate and resolve the challenges they represent.

The overarching goal of this book is simple but daunting: to foster quality care. Achieving quality requires a strong commitment to ethical behavior and leadership, ethics-grounded values and culture, and an effective program that promotes ethical actions and practices and clarifies those practices when needed. We offer this edition as a practical resource and guide in addressing that goal.

This second edition of *Managing Healthcare Ethically* contains more than 60 Healthcare Management Ethics columns from *Healthcare Executive* to guide executives and managers in making personal and organizational decisions. Most of the columns selected for this edition appeared in *Healthcare Executive* after the January/February 2001 issue. Sixteen of the selected columns come from the previous edition of this book. In making the difficult decision about which columns to exclude, we removed those that appeared redundant, less relevant, or too narrowly focused.

The 24 authors' perspectives reflect diverse backgrounds as executives, physicians, scholars, teachers, consultants, and ethicists. These authors share a common interest in promoting the development of ethical leaders and ethical healthcare organizations. In this regard, the language of the Joint Commission is quite unambiguous. The purpose of its organizational ethics standards is to "improve care, treatment, services, and outcomes by recognizing and respecting the rights of each patient and by conducting business in an ethical manner." Implicit in this statement is a firm conviction that the content of an organization's vision, mission, and value statements must be more than mere rhetoric. The daily decisions, actions, and behavior of everyone engaged in its programs and services should reflect the values inherent in these statements.

However, ethical conflicts that push executives beyond conventional thinking about the "right" course of action are inevitable.

Competent, reasonable people—including board members, executives, physicians and other clinicians, managers, nonsupervisory employees, patients, families, public officials, and community members—can and will disagree. One's uncertainty or conflicts can be reconciled by applying the following thoughtful, systematic ethics reflection process.

- Clarify the ethics question or uncertainty and the values in conflict.
- Describe the relevant facts surrounding the ethical uncertainty and determine what additional information is needed.
- Identify and understand the values of the key stakeholders.
- Recognize relevant ethics principles and ethics standards of practice.
- Develop feasible options and review the potential benefits and risks associated with each one.
- Select the optimal solution and provide the ethical rationale for the choice.
- Implement the decision.
- Evaluate whether the decision achieved the expected outcome(s) and identify what lessons were learned that might prevent or minimize similar conflicts in the future.

As we stated in the first edition, ethical reflection brings together the values and perspectives of many voices. These columns encourage such a dialogue. Again, their contents rarely give absolute answers, but they provide a guide for exploring conflicts through systematic ethical reflection. The columns examine ethical issues and conflicts in the everyday lives of executives and their organizations. We want to emphasize the importance of integrating ethics discourse and programs into the organization's culture.

In addition to including many new columns, the second edition focuses on the four ethics domains: ethical leadership issues, organizational and management ethics issues, clinical ethics issues, and ethics committees and programs. This edition also contains an

expanded section of ACHE ethics tools and resources, including the revised *Code of Ethics*, several new ethics policy statements, and an updated selected bibliography.

Ethics is not and should not be the sole responsibility of an organization's ethics committee or program. No group or individual should serve exclusively as the institution's conscience. An ethical organization is achieved not only through well-crafted policies and procedures; it is achieved when the leadership and the entire staff realize the necessity of ethical thinking and behavior in their routine and daily activities. These columns address patient care issues and the manner in which executives should treat their staff and relate to the broader community.

This book can be used in a variety of ways. It can be read from cover to cover, providing the reader with insights into a wide range of ethical conflicts. Readers can review a particular section or a specific article that corresponds to a conflict they may be experiencing. This book will foster the self-education of executives and managers seeking to enhance their ethics knowledge and skills. You may want to consider reading the stated ethical conflict or question at the beginning of a particular article and pause to think about how you would respond to the conflict before reading the commentary. Such an approach will help you compare your ethical reasoning with that of the author(s). This book can serve as an education resource for a course, a seminar, or an ethics discussion group. However it is used, thoughtful reflection on the various ethical perspectives will enhance your awareness of ethics issues and competing perspectives and values, and it will provide insight into how executive leaders and organizational policy might respond to the ethical conflict.