

## Who may request Ethics Consultation?

Anyone directly involved in a situation that raises ethical questions may request an ethics consultation.

Therefore, ethics consultations or discussions on ethical problems may be requested by any member of the health care team, by patients or persons receiving care, or by patients' families or significant others.

Any staff member may request educational help on ethical issues.

## Other Ethics Resources

The Bioethicist works with the Ethics Committees in each of the organizations of the St. Joseph's Health System.

In addition to ethics case consultation, the Ethics Consultation Service helps enhance patient care by providing assistance in three other areas:

- 1) ethics education,
- 2) policy development and review,
- 3) research and review of research.



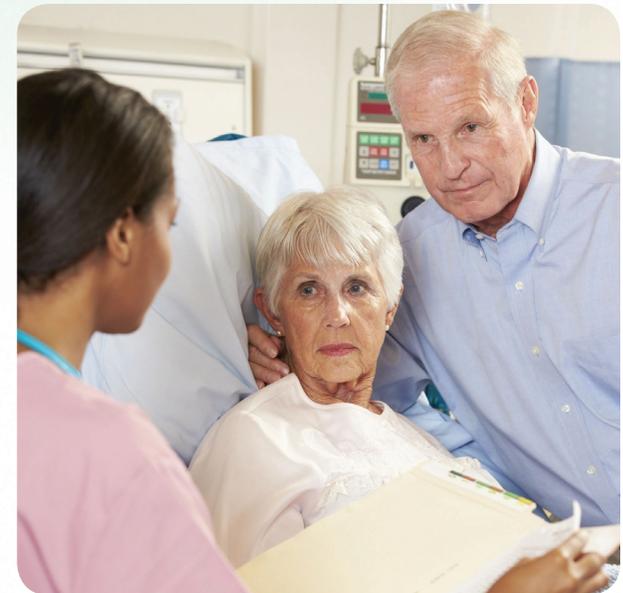
[www.sjhs.ca](http://www.sjhs.ca)

To speak to St. Joseph's Health System's Bioethicist, please call 905-522-1155 ext. 33866. If it is after business hours or on weekends, please speak to your healthcare team to have the Bioethicist on-call paged.

St. Joseph's Healthcare System is a member of the Centre for Clinical Ethics at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

# Ethics Consultation Service

*What supports are available when making difficult healthcare decisions?*



St. Joseph's  
Healthcare  Hamilton

*Painful choices are best made through open discussion among all those involved: patient, family, physicians, nurses and other members of the health care team. Often, such discussion will be sufficient to resolve the difficulties*

## What is the Ethics Consultation Service?

For help with issues that remain particularly difficult, St. Joseph's Health System offers the services of a Bioethicist.

The Bioethicist is available to provide help through ethics case consultation to those directly involved in situations that pose ethical difficulties.

## Ethics Case Consultation

In an ethics case consultation the role of the Bioethicist is to help patients, their families and health professionals identify, clarify and work through ethical concerns that may arise in difficult clinical situations.

The Bioethicist promotes communication among those involved, and often brings to the discussion a knowledge of current thinking on the issues that people are finding difficult.

Ethics consultation is an advisory service. This means that the Bioethicist will help guide the discussion, and will offer advice and assistance to guide the process of decision making. But the Bioethicist does not make the decisions. Patients,

family members and professionals remain responsible for their own decisions, person's wishes and values.

## Dealing With Difficult Ethical Decisions

Clinical decisions in health care often have some ethical aspects to them because they involve choices about what should be done and "What should be done?" is the basic question of ethics.

Patients and other persons receiving care, families and health care professionals sometimes face difficult decisions about treatments that involve moral principles, religious beliefs or professional guidelines.

Healthcare ethics tries to enable others to engage in a thoughtful exploration of how to act well and make morally good choices based on beliefs and values about life, health, suffering and death.

## What are some common ethical questions?

Generally, ethics questions arise when the right thing to do is not clear, or when people disagree about what is best for a person who is ill. Some examples of questions are:

*When should life support such as a ventilator be withdrawn?*

*What should family members do when there is a health care disagreement about a patient's care or treatment plan?*

*Should a patient "at risk" be allowed to go home?*

## What kind of education is offered?

Professionals develop their skills in attending to ethical issues through a number of formats:

- Educational rounds
- Inservices
- Group discussions
- Individual discussion
- Scheduled seminars with medical clerks, residents and unit staff

Among other opportunities there is an informal monthly ethics rounds, "Ethics in practice: Case Discussions in Bioethics," at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton on the first Tuesday of the month at noon. Similar events are held somewhat less frequently at the other organizations and sites including:



St. Joseph's  
Home Care

St. Joseph's  
Villa Dundas

