

UNCERTAINTY

What do you do when you don't
know what to do?

SCENARIOS

1. Does Not Meet Admission Criteria
2. Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat
3. I Heard it Through the Grapevine

DOES NOT MEET ADMISSION CRITERIA

Judy is a Clinical Manager who has been approached by her team with concerns about a patient. Michael is a 32-year-old man diagnosed with bipolar and borderline personality disorders. He has a long history of very challenging behaviour and presents to Emergency Departments and the Crisis Stabilization Unit regularly. While an inpatient, Michael usually refuses to fully participate in a treatment plan. He frequently makes suicidal gestures. He has presented to the ED again today.

DOES NOT MEET ADMISSION CRITERIA

His family is highly stressed from trying to live with Michael's alienating and self-destructive behaviour and frequent threats of suicide. They have said he is no longer welcome at home. Admission has been requested, but was refused because he "doesn't meet admission criteria". The Mental Health team has assessed Michael as chronically suicidal, but competent and not a danger to himself or others. Judy's team is experiencing significant pressure from Michael's family to admit him. They are not comfortable sending Michael home, but are unsure what to do next.

SIT DOWN, YOU'RE ROCKING THE BOAT

It is a busy morning on the ward. Alex is shocked to discover that one of the senior nurses has administered the IV antibiotic for the patient in Bed 2 to the patient in Bed 1. Fortunately, they both happen to be on the same drug, same route, same dose, with a slightly different schedule. Alex is new to the ward, and has been struggling to fit in. She has noticed a lot of unpleasant gossip and personality conflicts among the staff but tries hard to get along with everyone. She knows she ought to report the error, but since there was really no harm, she does not want to “rock the boat”.

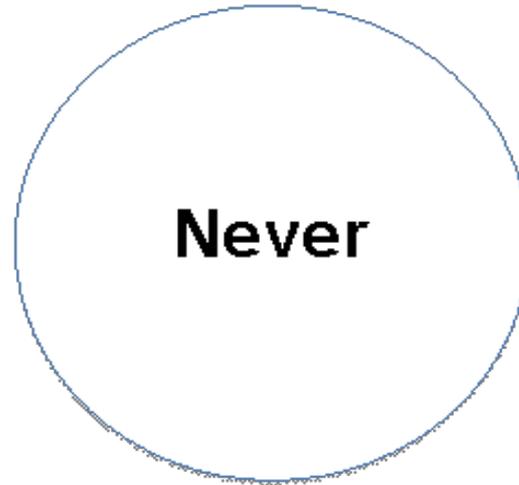
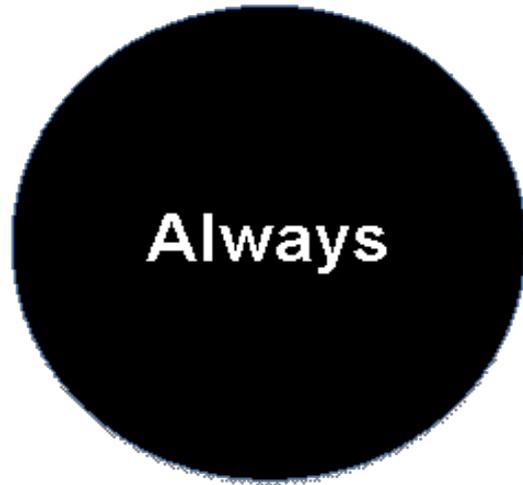
I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

Vern works in a hospital as an Occupational Therapist. He is also a dad, and is very friendly with the other parents on his son's soccer team. During a game, while chatting with another parent, the subject turned to difficult neighbours. The parent told Vern about a grumpy neighbour who complained about her dog barking, a claim she denied. She also described the man's hoarding problem.

I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

A few days later, the neighbour presents to the Emergency Department. Vern is not assigned to the case, but hears about it in Discharge Planning Rounds. Vern has information on the patient which may affect his discharge, but is unsure if he should raise it, since it was not obtained via a professional assessment process, and since he is not entirely sure of his source's motives in providing the information.

THE “RIGHT” THING



Sometimes it's easy to know what to do. There are certain things that we intuitively know are right or wrong. We don't always agree with others, but in our hearts, many of us can say with certainty that there are things we would always or never do.

THE “RIGHT” THING



Most of the time, it's a lot harder than that. Usually, the “right” solution is somewhere in the gray area, not clearly at the black or white ends of this gradient. Nearly everything falls into that gray area. The space between always and never is uncertainty.

MORAL UNCERTAINTY

- Uncertainty is the force underlying all ethical dilemmas.
- Conflicts between values or opinions on what is the “right” choice make it difficult to decide what to do.
- Choices are difficult to make when they
 - have more than one good option
 - are limited to “bad” options
 - have unpredictable outcomes
 - must follow rules or obligations that may not strictly apply in the context
 - compromise personal integrity

CONCEPTS IN ETHICS

- Decisions in ethical situations can be guided by
 - Values - Autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, safety, care, veracity, fidelity, respect
 - Virtues – the “morally excellent thing to do”
 - Rules – policy, law, social convention
 - Consequences – what could happen?
 - Decision-making tools

WHAT DO YOU DO...

...when you are morally uncertain?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What do you know for sure?
- How do you know it?
- What are you uncertain of?
- What do you do when you are uncertain?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why is uncertainty a problem in health care?
- What are the uncertainties in each of the scenarios?
- How would you resolve situations like these?

DECISION-MAKING TOOLS

Decision-making frameworks can help when we are not sure what to do.

There are many different frameworks available. All of them take the user systematically through the ethical considerations of the situation causing the uncertainty.

Tools and Frameworks can help people make sure they have thought through all the relevant factors before making a decision.

FRAMEWORK

Use the framework you know. If you have not used one before, the MB-PHEN Ethical Decision-Making Framework is an option. It can help you work through all the important considerations in an ethical situation.

The next slide will give you an overview of the framework. The full document with worksheets can be found on the MB-PHEN website.



FRAMEWORK

1. Clarifying the uncertainty
 - Review facts, assumptions and biases, stakeholders
2. Describing the ethical considerations
 - Principles, risks, rules, values, relationships
3. Choosing a solution
 - List options, justify choice
4. Implementing and evaluating
 - Address moral distress, policy implications



OTHER TOOLS

- The tools described in the Resources document are examples of tools that may work for your situation. They are meant to guide decision-makers to include as many relevant considerations as possible when faced with a difficult decision.
- Many sites and organizations have developed frameworks that are known to the ethics resources in the area. You may find it helpful to look at the framework used by your site or Regional Health Authority, or speak with someone on your ethics committee.

APPLYING A FRAMEWORK

Use a decision-making framework to think through the cases described at the beginning of this presentation.

- How does a framework help ?
- Are there limitations or challenges to using a framework?
- What did you consider that you might not have without the framework?



RESOURCES

Please go to the MB-PHEN website for additional resources and discussion points.

www.MB-PHEN.ca