

**ETHICS  
CONSULTATION  
SERVICES**

**Ethics Committee  
Stonehill Franciscan Services**

**June 2017**

Good health care requires more than the use of the most recent and sophisticated technology. How best to treat a resident involves consideration of the principles, values, and religious beliefs of the resident, his/her family or significant others, and of the care providers. In other words, there is an ethical dimension to health care decisions.

### **What are some common ethical problems in senior services?**

When should medical treatments (such as resuscitation, antibiotics, or feeding tubes) be started, continued, or stopped?

What should be done when a resident refuses treatment or therapy which health care providers recommend, or when a resident wants treatment which health care providers believe will be futile?

What should be done when a resident refuses or is unable to take nourishment?

How should treatment decisions be made for residents who can no longer communicate their wishes? Who should make these decisions?

What happens when there is a disagreement between the resident (or his/her family) and health care providers about the recommended course of treatment or disagreement among family members (e.g., about whether the resident should be hospitalized, about the level of care)?

What should be done if a health care provider has ethical reservations about what a resident wants?

### **What kind of help is available with ethical issues?**

Residents and their family members/significant others may discuss the ethical dimensions of treatment decisions and services with physicians, nurses, or pastoral care staff. Health care providers may talk with other staff members. However, a time may come when residents, family members/significant others, or health care providers feel they have reached the limits of their personal or professional ability to address an ethical issue. In such cases, an ethics consult may be helpful.

Ethics consultation is a service offered by the Ethics Committee of Stonehill Franciscan Services. The Ethics Committee is advisory in nature and does NOT make decisions. It facilitates a discussion to help residents, family members/significant others, and health care providers make their own decisions.

## **What is an *ethics consult* and who will be involved?**

An ethics consult is a meeting with members of Stonehill's Ethics Committee. The meeting will usually involve the individuals requesting the consult and a small subcommittee of the Ethics Committee.

Stonehill's Ethics Committee includes both staff from Stonehill Franciscan Services and individuals from the community (a physician, an ethicist, an attorney, a representative from Stonehill's Board, and members of the Sisters of St. Francis).

## **What kind of help can be expected from an ethics consult?**

Ethics consultants may

- Provide information about ethical principles involved in a case.
- Help clarify what options are available.
- Share information about similar cases.
- Provide information about relevant policies at Stonehill Franciscan Services.
- Provide information about teachings of the Catholic Church on health care issues.
- Make recommendations which are advisory in nature.

## **When should an ethics consult be requested?**

An ethics consult is not intended to replace normal lines of communication about ethical issues among health care providers, residents, and families/significant others. However, an ethical consult may be helpful when:

- A resident, family member, or health care provider wants help in "talking through" ethical issues involving a resident's care.
- There is serious ethical disagreement among family members/significant others, between health care providers and the resident/family members/significant others, or among health care providers.
- A resident, family member/significant other, or health care provider would like to have the benefit of other perspectives in working through an ethical problem.

## **How is an ethics consult arranged?**

A resident or a family member/significant other may inform the resident's physician, a nurse, or another health care provider that s/he wants an ethics consult; the health care provider will in turn contact the Administrator of Stonehill Health Center or, if she is not available, the Director of Nursing, to arrange the consult. A resident or family member/significant other may also contact directly the Administrator or Director of Nursing to request a consult.

A physician or other health care provider wishing an ethics consult may contact the Director of Nursing, their Department Manager, the House Supervisor, or a social worker, who will in turn contact the Administrator of Stonehill Health Center. They may also contact the Administrator directly.

**Is an ethics consult confidential? Will any records of it be kept?**

All information involved in ethics consults will be treated with confidentiality.

An Ethics Consult Record will be completed for an ethics consult. This record is for internal use only and will be kept in a locked file in the office of the Administrator of Stonehill Health Center. A general note will always be placed in the resident's medical record that an ethics consult has taken place. Specific directives for the resident's care coming from the consult will be noted in the resident's medical record.

The ethics consult and its outcome will be reviewed by Stonehill's Ethics Committee. However, the minutes of the Ethics Committee will only note that a consult was reviewed; absolutely no details of the case or identifying information will appear in the minutes.

The resident's physician will be informed of a request for an ethics consult as a matter of professional courtesy.

**Is there any charge for an ethics consult?**

No. Ethics consults are provided as a free service of the Ethics Committee.

**Are recommendations given in an ethics consult legally binding?**

No. Any recommendations which may be given are purely advisory. Residents, family members/significant others, and health care providers remain responsible for making their own decisions.

It should also be kept in mind that ethics consults give advice only about ethical dimensions of resident care. An ethics consult is not a substitute for legal counsel when this is needed.

**What if an ethics consult does not resolve the problem?**

The Ethics Committee will recommend other responsible people who may be sought to help resolve the issue.

***For further information about ethics consults, please contact:  
Stonehill Health Center Administrator  
at 563 557-7180.***