

Clinical Ethics Consultation Service (ECS)

The MSHMC Ethics Committee has three primary functions: education, policy development and consultation. The consultation function is carried out by the ECS.

Most challenges that arise within patient care are best handled by speaking with the medical team members who are directly involved. The ECS is designed to respond to topics such as advance directives and surrogate decision-making, withholding and withdrawing life-sustaining treatments, informed consent, and organ procurement. It is appropriate to call the ECS when:

1. There is an ethics problem in the care of patients, *and*
2. Healthcare providers have not been able to establish a resolution that is agreed upon by the patient/surrogate and the clinicians caring for the patient.

You should consider asking for an ethics consultation even when patient care is not the central issue if you believe that there is a lack of clarity about an ethics policy or concept that would benefit from education (e.g., a question about professionalism, or a general question about patient privacy/confidentiality).

A clinical ethics consultation is designed to:

- Help systematically examine the ethical dimensions of the case at hand;
- Articulate options and alternatives regarding ethical concerns;
- Promote shared decision making between patients (or their surrogates, if decisionally incapacitated) and their clinicians;
- Facilitate discussion and (when appropriate) offer guidance. *(over)*



PennState
College of Medicine

Ethics Committee
Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center
Phone: (717) 531-8778 • Fax: (717) 531-3894

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who may request an ethics consultation?

Anyone who is involved in caring for a patient, including residents, nurses, family members, and/or patients themselves, can request an ethics consultation.

2. Do I have to have someone else's approval (e.g. Patient? Attending?) to request an ethics consultation?

No one else's approval is required for you to request an ethics consultation. Usually the attending physician is notified of the request, but confidential requests are allowed (see next question).

3. Can ethics consultation requests be confidential?

Yes, but we will always ask that you tell *us* who you are.

4. How do I request an ethics consultation?

Call the hospital operator at ext. 8521 and ask for the on-call ethics consultant. The ECS is available Monday – Friday, 7am to 6pm. After hours, ethics consultation requests are triaged through the administrators on call (AOCs), available by calling ext. 8521.

5. If I call an ethics consultation, will that change who has decision-making authority for the patient?

No. Medical decision-making authority remains with the clinical team.

6. Who pays for the ethics consultation?

Ethics consultation is provided free of charge.

Want more information?

Check HMC Policy: *Ethics Committee*, A-36 HAM. Search “ethics committee” @ www.ama-assn.org/ to see *Code of Medical Ethics of the American Medical Association* opinion 9.11 & 9.115.

Questions?

Call the operator (ext. 8521) and ask for the ethicist on-call.