



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR ETHICS COMMITTEES

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An important function of ethics committees is to review policies in development or revision with an ethics lens. This type of policy analysis anticipates the potential ethical challenges with operationalization and compliance, and provides opportunities to address those challenges prior to implementation.

This document was adapted from the Winnipeg West Integrated Health and Social Services Policy Development Protocol. It sets out a series of questions to be applied in discussions on new and revised policies. It is by no means inclusive of every possible ethical consideration. For a given policy, some questions will be applicable, and others will require extensive dialogue. You may also identify other factors that should be included. It is intended to guide discussion and draw attention to any potential ethical concerns or challenges. It can be used by individual policy analysts, but is best used by policy or ethics committees, as group discussions often result in more robust decisions.

Feedback on how this document is used, or could be improved, can be provided to WRHA Ethics Services.

Questions for consideration in policy analysis:

- Are there professional codes of conduct on this issue?
- Is the policy consistent with regional or organizational values?
 - List and explore each stated value
- Does the policy support declared patient values?
 - List and explore each item in the Region's Declaration of Patient Values
- Are there any implications from ethical principles such as
 - Respect for autonomy
 - Does the policy affect the ability of people to make their own choices about their care?
 - Beneficence
 - Does the policy harm patients?
 - Staff? Is there conflict?

- Non-maleficence
 - Does the policy increase the risk of harm to anyone involved?
 - Does the policy incur risk from inaction (what it may preclude from being done or pose barriers to)?
- Fidelity
 - Are there any professional responsibilities and / or institutional roles this policy does not adhere to?
- Justice
 - Does this policy neglect the rights of any stakeholder?
- Are there health equity implications of this policy such as:
 - Individuals or population groups experiencing disadvantage due to the policy? (e.g., possible intended and unintended outcomes)
 - Not preferentially addressing health status gaps.
 - Contributing to accessibility, availability and acceptability barriers in the healthcare system.
 - Not allocating resources based on population health.
- Are conflicts of interest anticipated as a result of this policy? Does it mitigate any?
- Does the policy conflict or overlap with any other policy? If so, is a hierarchy established (i.e. does the policy state which is to be followed in case of conflict)?
- Have risks associated with compliance/noncompliance been acknowledged?
- Does the policy support the provision of high quality health care?
 - Will the resulting behaviours meet care or industry standards?
 - Does it create or exacerbate power differentials?
 - Does it acknowledge or address the potential for contextual features such as cultural or spiritual issues, communication processes or the conduct of research?
- Are there any outstanding ethical “red flags”?

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