Chapter 5: Ethics

**Terminology**
- Ethics
- Morals
- Unethical

**Codes of Ethics**
- Professional
  - EMT Code of Ethics
  - Code for Nurses with Interpretative Statements
  - American Medical Association’s Principles of Medical Ethics
  - Principles of Ethics for Emergency Physicians
- Personal
  - Ethics impact individual practice
  - A personal code of ethics is an important reflection on one’s life
Accountability

• Professional
• Legal
• Moral

Answering Ethical Questions

• Emotion should not be a factor

• Decisions must not be based solely on opinions of others or global protocols that were designed to guide, not dictate practice (e.g., codes of the profession)

Answering Ethical Questions

• Remember:
  • No one knows all the answers

  • None of the tools or techniques available to use is sufficient in every case to arrive at the “right” decision
Rapid Approach to Emergency Medical Problems

Ethical Tests in Health Care

- “What is in the patient’s best interests?”
- Determining what patient wants
- Role of “good faith” in making ethical decisions

Global Concepts

- Provide patient benefit
- Avoid harm
- Recognize patient autonomy
Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

• Resolving ethical dilemmas when global concepts are in conflict
  • Within healthcare community
  • Within the public

Contemporary Ethical Issues

• Paramedics will face several ethical issues during the course of their careers
• Most will deal with:
  • Patient’s right to self-determination (autonomy)
  • Paramedic’s obligation to provide patient care (beneficence)

Allocation of Resources

• Factors affecting true equality in allocation of resources include:
  • Person’s access to health insurance
    • May define which medical services are covered or excluded
  • Treatment decisions that are made when resources are inadequate to meet patient care needs (e.g., during a multiple casualty disaster)
### Decisions Surrounding Resuscitation
- What the patient really wants
- When in doubt, resuscitate
- Resuscitation after an advance directive is found

### Confidentiality
- A fundamental right
- Ethics and confidential information

### Consent
- Patient right to make decisions regarding health care
**Ethics**

- Ethics of implied consent
- Cases in which patients refuse lifesaving care can produce legal and ethical conflicts

**Care in Futile Situations**

- An action is considered *futile* if it serves no purpose or is completely ineffective
- When emergency care is being provided in situations that may be futile, consult with medical direction

**Care in Futile Situations**

- It generally is recommended that CPR is futile and should not be attempted on patients with obvious signs of death:
  - Decapitation
  - Rigor mortis
  - Tissue decompensation
  - Extreme dependent lividity
Obligation to Provide Care

• Good Samaritan
• Inability to pay
• Isn’t in the “health plan”
• Patient “dumping”
• Economic triage

Advocacy & Accountability

• Paramedic serves as patient advocate while providing care

Role as Physician Extender

• The paramedic must generally follow the orders of the medical director or his or her designee