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Joint Centre for Bioethics
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Ethical Social Work Maintaining Standards in a Sea of Complexity

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Disclosure

- **No actual or potential Conflicts of Interest**
- **Case examples are fictional**

Outline

- **Ethical Conflicts in Social Work Practice**
- **Ethics**
- **Addressing the Issues**
- **Social Work today**

Case Study A

- **Mr. R, 77, in hospital, ++ medical issues**
- **No OHIP; no insurance**
- **Visitor's visa expired**
- **Needs surgery and medications**
- **Family unable to pay for treatment**

Case Study A

- **Mr. R says he wants to go home to die**
- **Sons want Mr. R treated at the hospital**
- **There is a waiting list for Mr. R's surgery**
- **Mr. R lacks airfare to return to Guatemala**
- **Social worker: “ I want to advocate for the pt, but hospital policy is to provide emergency care only ”**

Case Study B

- Tom is the only school social worker in an Ontario town
- Mario, 10, is referred to him re emotional difficulties. M talks about a troubled home life.
- Tom's daughter plays T Ball
- Mario's mother organizes the T Ball
- Tom feels this personal connection may compromise his professional interactions with Mario's mother
- Tom struggles with this COI

Case Study C

- Julie is a new social worker at St Elsewhere
- Julie helps Mrs P, 86, to apply to 3 PCUs
- 2nd Choice PCU offers a bed
- The hospital would like the pt to accept
- Mrs. P wants to wait for her 1st choice (long waiting list)
- Julie feels that the pt should die where she wants

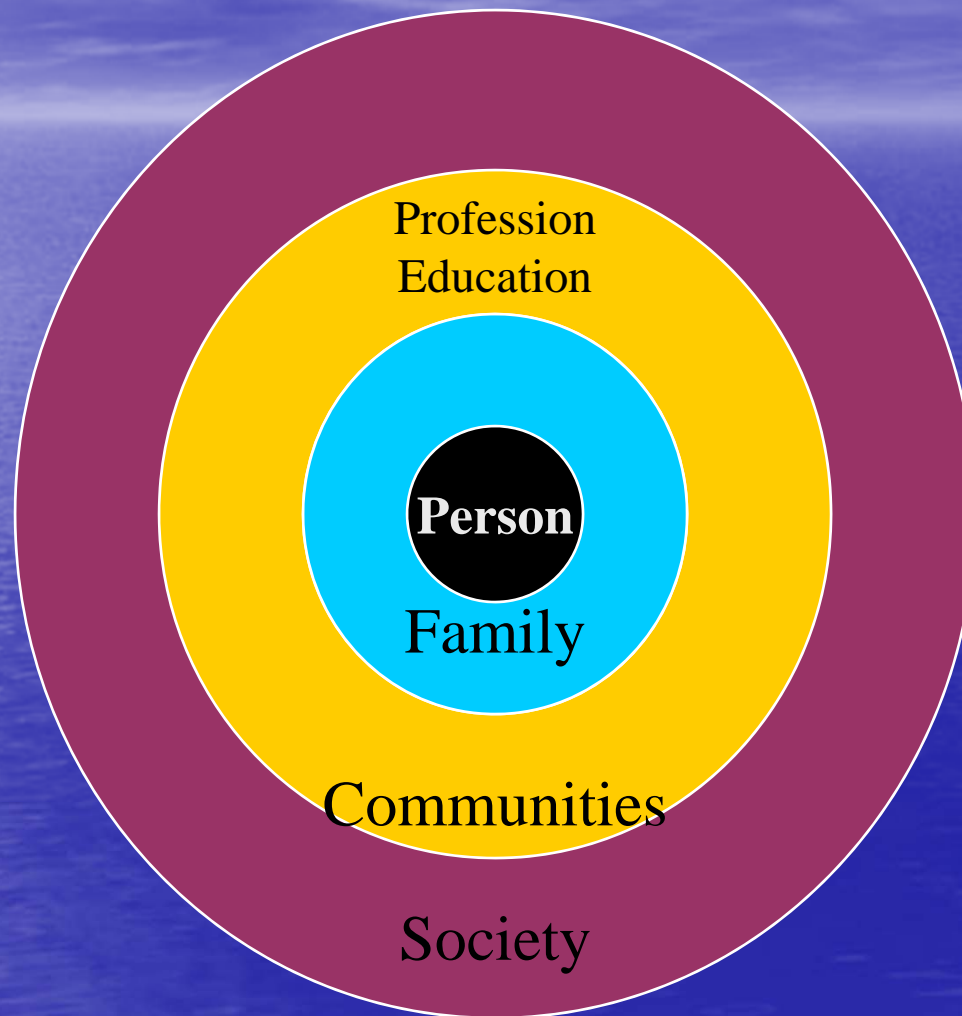
Case Study D

- **Mike: SW in a mental health setting**
- **Stella (client) is entitled to 10 sessions there**
- **Stella needs more therapy**
- **Mike does private practice from home**
- **Stella asks to continue therapy with Mike, in his private practice**
- **Mike is told this is a COI**

Ethics and Social Work

- **Social workers attend to psychological and emotional needs of clients & families**
- **Psychological and emotional distress is often caused by moral conflict**
- **Knowledge of Ethics can help social workers address the emotional needs of the client & families**

Derivation of Values



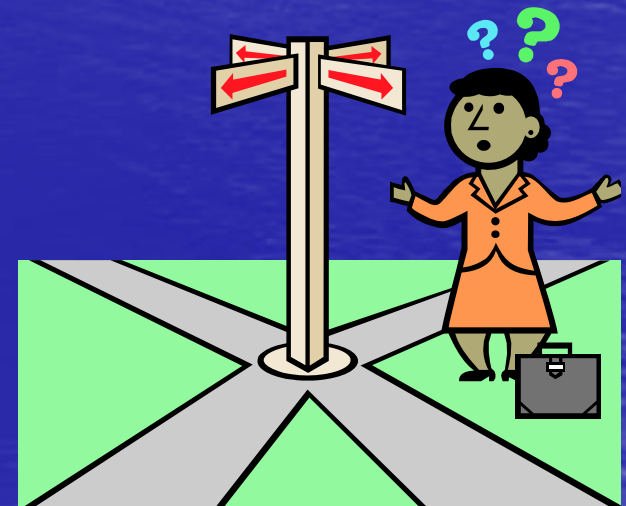
Social Work Values

- Social Justice
- Integrity
- Advocacy
- Service
- Respect for Persons (dignity, worth)
- Human Relationships
- Competence in Practice



What is Ethical?

- How do we determine what is / not ethical?
- How do we resolve ethical conflicts?



Ethics

- Deciding *what* we should do (what decisions are morally right or acceptable)
- Explaining *why* we should do it (justifying our decision in moral terms)
- Deciding *how* we should do it (the method or manner of our response)

Barbara Secker, Joint Centre for Bioethics, U of T.

What is Bioethics?

- Explores ethical questions arising from biology, medicine, and healthcare
- Encompasses boardroom to bedside
- Medical decisions are made within a social context



Bioethics: An Interdisciplinary Field

- **Medicine, nursing, law, social work, chaplaincy and philosophy all influence bioethics**
- **Each field of study presents a unique perspective on ethical problems & solutions**

Ethical Theories: Ethics of Care

- **Emphasis on the relationships between persons, esp. between healthcare team members and patients**
- **Not enough to provide care to patient, rather the patient must feel *cared for* in the process**

What is an Ethical Conflict?

- Ethical course of action is unclear
- Reasons to support several positions
- Decision must be made based on the most right or the least wrong choice of action
- *Moral distress*: stress and anxiety in situations where a desirable solution to a moral conflict exists but cannot be carried out due to a lack of means

Ethical Frameworks: Four-Boxes Model

Medical indications	Patient preferences
Quality of life	Contextual factors

Jonsen A., Siegler M., Winslade W. (1998) *Clinical Ethics*. McGraw-Hill: New York.

Ethics Worksheet

- I** Identify the facts
- D** Determine relevant ethical principles
- E** Explore the options
- A** Act - Recommend and implement

Step 4: Act on Your Decision and Evaluate

Step 3: Explore Options

Explore options and consider their strengths and weaknesses

Step 2: Determine the Ethical Principles in Conflict

Identify ethical issues

Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet

- I** Identify the facts
- D** Determine the ethical principles in conflict
- E** Explore the options
- A** Act on your decision and evaluate

Step 1: Identify the Facts - 4 Box Method

Medical Indications:

State the client's medical problem, history, and diagnosis; its etiology, chronicity, critical elements, and reversibility; Goals of treatment? Probabilities of success? Plans in case of therapeutic failure? Potential benefits of care? How can harm be avoided? Medical care if service is discontinued?

Client Preferences:

State the client's preferences. Do they have the capacity to decide? If yes, are client's wishes informed, understood, voluntary? If not, who is substitute decision maker? Does the client have prior, expressed wishes? Is client's right to choose being respected?

Quality of Life:

Describe quality of life in client's terms, client's subjective acceptance of likelihood of life, and views and concerns of care providers. Examine the emotional factors influencing each individual, such as existing feelings, values, biases and prior experiences.

Contextual Features:

Are other family involved or significant relationship? Any care plans put in place to date? Relevant social, legal, economic, and institutional circumstances? Other relevant features, e.g. religious & cultural factors, limits on confidentiality, resource allocation issues, legal implications, research or teaching involved, provider conflict of interest? **Organizational values to consider?**

Adapted from Jensen, Albert, Siegel, Mark and William J. Whelan. Clinical Ethics: A Practical Approach to Ethical Decision in Clinical Medicine Publisher: Mc Graw-Hill Medical, 3rd Edition (May 22, 2002)

What is the expected to happen, if the situation

For each alternative, what are the risks and benefits?

for Living at Risk

named about yourself?



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Ethical Frameworks: IDEA

- **Identify the facts and relevant stakeholders**
- **Determine the ethical principles in conflict**
- **Explore Options**
- **Act on your decision and evaluate**

Ethical Decision Making for the Community Health and Support Sector (2005)
Toronto CCAC.



Social Work Codes of Ethics

OCSWSSW Code of Ethics

- **Two main types of issues:**

1. Respect of Client

- **Client centred, not professional centred**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Client self determination (autonomy)**

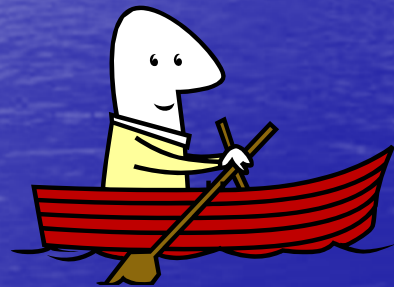
OCSWSSW Code of Ethics

- Two main types of issues:
 2. Uphold Professional Duties
 - Maintain competence
 - Integrity
 - Responsibility in service provision
 - Duties around record keeping

CASW Code of Ethics

- **Two main types of issues:**
 - **Respect of Client**
 - **1. Social work is founded on a commitment to respect the dignity and individual worth of all persons**
 - **Uphold Professional Duties**
 - **Social workers demonstrate respect for the profession's purpose, values, and ethical principles relevant to their field of practice**

Back to the cases...



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- Mario is referred to him re emotional difficulties. M talks about a troubled home life.
- Tom's daughter plays T Ball
- M's mother organizes the T Ball
- Tom feels this personal connection may compromise his professional interactions with M's mother
- How does Tom move forward?

Case Study C

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- Julie helps Mrs P, 86, to apply to 3 PCUs
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Social Work Today

- **Important attributes**
- **Knowledge Base**
- **Skill Set**

Social Work: Knowledge Base

- Human behaviour
- Individual, Family, Group dynamics
- Managing people
- Societal norms
- Systems theory



Social Work: Skill Set

- Ability to identify, understand & interact with:
 - Values & belief systems
 - Organizational Systems
 - Person in society (ecological approach)
- Communication skills



Conclusion

- **Potential contribution is large**
- **There are opportunities to demonstrate Social Work expertise**



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Thank You!

