

# THE PROFESSIONAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



**ASSISTANT LECTURER  
DR. NADA S. SHAKER**

# ETHICAL PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTION

- Ethical problem is a conflict between two moral obligations whereas the ethical problem in pharmacotherapy can be defined as the conflict between moral obligations that can put in danger the pharmacological treatment that is the best for the patient. In general there are two origins of ethical problems:
- Those originating from doubts about morality of the act in itself in the face of strongly opposed arguments e.g stealing a drug to save your child life.
- Those originating from doubt about decision whether to do 1 or 2 , both being mutually exclusive e.g conflicts can occur between the law or policy guidelines and the best patient care.

# IDENTIFYING AND WORK UP OF AN ETHICAL PROBLEMS

- Identifying ethical problem is a part of communication this mean that knowing the patient is the first step to achieving any success , through discussion , practitioner can gather information from the patient about patient desire , values, expectations, beliefs and needs.
- Working up of an ethical problem is an attempt to formalize the decision making process, ethical decision making is not an exact science, in hard cases ethical cases may not determine the right outcome.

# WORK UP OF AN ETHICAL PROBLEMS

1. Recognize when a patient encounter raises an important ethical problem and gather relevant facts.
2. Work up with the patient to describe the problem that has to be resolved.
3. Determine what will be an acceptable resolution to the problem.
4. Generate reasonable alternatives to resolve the ethical problem , and consider each option in relation to the fundamental ethical principles and patients preferences.
5. Select the decision and critically examined ( be able to defend it publicly).

# DECISION MAKING IN SOLVING PROBLEM

- Decision by pharmacist are part of problem solving
- Some are easy and simple like strength or dose of a medicine others may be difficult require processing of information and take time to get a clear answer
- An analysis of what the pharmacist did and why he did it fasten the way to take decision in similar situations in future., Decision could be documented for new inexperienced pharmacists on how to deal with uncertainties in such a case.

- So for ethical decision making pharmacist should
  1. Identify the principles involved in the case
  2. Judge which should take priority
  3. Consider as many outcomes as possible
  4. Decide which outcome is the best
  5. Be prepared to justify actions

# INTRODUCTION

some decision-making must proceed In the face of uncertainty, particularly as to whether the chosen Action is the 'best or right' course to take. For example, would you Always deny a patient access to pain-killing controlled drugs because her Prescription is not legally valid? Conflicts can arise Between the law or policy guidelines and best patient care, or between Differing ethical

# INTRODUCTION

goals such as telling the truth or respecting the patient's Wishes. A decision-making process can help you to analyze the bits of a Problem that can be solved with some certainty and provide a framework To identify those remaining aspects that call for your judgement as a professional.



# Decision making process benefits

Such a process can provide:

- 1) A mechanism to allow you to practice dealing with problems before they Arise
- 2) • A method of structured thinking that improves your ability to respond Rationally when urgent problems arise and you are under pressure
- 3) • A means of identifying the values involved in your decision-making
- 4) • A means of identifying areas of certainty and uncertainty

5) A basis for risk management in prospect

6) • A basis for your defense in retrospect

7) • An aid to reflective practice and improvement of practice

8) • A technique that allows inclusion of all aspects of a problem –  
clinical, Legal and ethical.

So what features should we expect to find in a good decision-making Process?

## **Systematic structure**

An analysis of **What you did and why you did it** is of help the next time you are Presented with a similar decision to make. It helps to make clear to Inexperienced pharmacists the issues you identified in the problem, how You tackled the uncertainties in each and how they influenced the final Decision. As well as providing an opportunity for reflection, a systematic Structure allows you to resolve problems.

An analysis undertaken of what might go wrong Before an event – is called a *risk assessment* – . In most instances, Particularly with complex systems involving many individuals, such as Dispensing prescriptions or taking blood pressure or a drug history, Some aspects of the process can be known with reasonable certainty.

For These, it may be appropriate to delegate tasks to trained staff working Within standard operating procedures, leaving the more uncertain areas To the pharmacist. Once the routine aspects of the situation have been addressed, the pharmacist can apply judgement and experience within a Systematic framework of questions and options to achieve a resolution Of the remaining problem.

## Rational reasoning

A good professional decision should be underpinned by reason and Rationality. To consider an example, let us say that in your work As a pharmacist you decline to deal with patients whose surnames suggest They are of scottish origin, for Example. Your reason is that you don't like the scots! Clearly, this is not An acceptable reason for your decisions. Extend the scene to a refusal to Deal with substance misusers,

or homeless people, or alcoholics and at First sight we may assume that these are not decisions that could resist Challenge, at least not in a healthcare context. But what if a specific individual Is so violent or abusive that he causes offence or danger to other Patients? Exclusion from the service might then be seen as reasonable.

**In simple words** We can see from the brief examples above that it is important to Reflect upon the reasons behind the decisions you take. Not only that But to consider whether the reasons are rational (i.E. Reasonable in the Circumstances). This leads on to recognition that uncertainty can also Arise because we cannot always establish all the required facts. We cannot Always know what the views of the patient might be, nor of relatives, but we will probably have to try and find out.



**we can not always predict** whether side-effects will manifest themselves, nor Whether the patient will cope with them nor whether the likelihood of a Cure is all that certain. We may have to make **temporary decisions** and take More when specific aspects become better known. **When asked to predict Our decisions, we use phrases such as 'well it all depends, it depends On the circumstances'**. If challenged to justify our decisions, most of us Will hopefully recall the particular circumstances that decided us to take One option in preference to another.

## Value-based reasoning

One way of establishing that reasons are rational would be to base them on evidence. Pharmacists are very familiar with this approach. However, basing decisions solely on evidence can lead to 'spock reason' a term to denote decision-making based on suppression of emotional response and reliance on logic alone. Evidence must be considered alongside values, particularly those of the patient.

## Identifying issues and resources

It is rarely possible to make a good decision without information. The Information needed for a professional decision is likely to be clinical, Legal or ethical – or all three. Generally speaking, pharmacists have little Difficulty identifying clinical issues or in knowing where to look to find The information needed to clarify them.

it is usual to suggest that the principles For ethical decision-making are to respect the autonomy of the individual , Avoid harm, where possible achieve benefit and consider fairly the Interests of all those affected. This can unfortunately be too superficial And limiting unless a proper study is undertaken of how these four principles Were determined. It may not be apparent that concepts of confidentiality Or consent or telling the truth are implicit in the analysis of What is encompassed by each of the four principles

the classic example is usually given of the legally invalid prescription presented for a patient in urgent need of morphine for pain. do you stick to the letter of the law and refuse to supply or do you break the law and supply because your highest obligation is to do good for the patient? this is an example of an ethical problem.

an ethical dilemma is rather more rare in current pharmacy practice but arises when 'two or more choices are morally justifiable, but only one is capable of being acted upon' you have an obligation to act to protect the well-being of the patient but also to maintain good relations with professional colleagues – which should take precedence? one might go further and suggest a further conflict between the patient's right to be fully informed and her need to trust in the doctor's judgement.

- Ethical problems in pharmacotherapy include
- Problems with pharmacotherapy decision
  - I. In evaluation of the benefits and risks of the necessary therapy prescribed
  - II. In the inclusion of patient preferences in the pharmacotherapeutics decision (e.g. case 1)
- Discrimination
- Which occur either in the use of or the cost of therapy for the patient
  - I. Negative discrimination
  - II. Positive discrimination

- Negative discrimination in the use of the pharmacotherapy
- This refers to the non utilization of suitable therapies for elderly or women without situations of comorbidity which justify it, it is not ethical as it does not respect the principles of non malificance and justice
- Positive discrimination in the use or in the cost of therapy
- E.g using blood transfusion in groups that doesn't accept it due to religious beliefs



# CASE STUDY

- MA 30yrs old female works in TV advertisement diagnosed with hodgkin lymphoma, in hospital treated with chemotherapy and radiation , she noticed hair loss and informed her doctor, but the doctor told her it was temporary. She told her doctor she refuse any ttt that will cause hair loss, doctor decide to start new therapy which is the best for her case but when she went to pharmacy to refill prescription pharmacist discovered that the doctor didn't tell her about the side effects of this therapy which include hair loss.

# DISCUSSION

- Now we need to justify which action is the best for the patient
- If we choose beneficence we prefer the doctor idea of withholding the truth but this will have negative consequences , since patient confidence with pharmacist will be lost at the time side effects appear (hair loss) and may lead to patient non compliance and refusal to continue medication
- So best action beneficence (therapy) but also to discuss with patient about disease consequences which may be fatal , tell her that hair loss will be temporary during therapy , and will regrow again.