

Ethics Standards and Resources

The American Nurses' Association (ANA) Code of Ethics for Nurses (2001) provides a framework that describes the primary goals, values, and obligations of the nursing profession. The document outlines ethical standards of the profession, the ethical obligations and duties of the nurse, and articulates nursing's commitment to the provision of quality healthcare to the community at large. The MGH Department of Nursing is fully committed to the incorporation of the ANA Code into the practice of nursing. The MGH Nursing leadership believes that the ANA Code of Ethics is non-negotiable. To this end, MGH nurses have access to a network of resources that provide support to their achievement of the highest ethical and professional standards.

The ethics resources at MGH cover a wide spectrum of services that are organized around committee structures, consultation, education and policy.

- **Ethics Committees** are widely utilized by staff and patients. Staff nurses are active members of ethics committees at MGH. Committee structures provide education, consultation and policy development/review functions to insure sound ethical practice. Committees include Ethics in Clinical Practice Committee, Optimum Care Committee, Pediatric Bioethics Committee, Emergency Department Bioethics Committee and the Ethics Task Force. Interdisciplinary staff and patients/families can access the clinical ethics committees (Pediatric Bioethics, Optimum Care, etc.) for clinical ethics consultation services. The Ethics Task Force provides a coordinating function, and offers a beeper service available through the page operator to assist staff with questions regarding ethical aspects of care and direct them to the most appropriate resource. The Ethics in Clinical Practice Committee provides a forum for interdisciplinary collaboration around ethics education and policy development.

Other resources available are the Office of the General Counsel, Office of Patient Advocacy, Social Services, Palliative Care Service and Chaplaincy. Education in ethics is provided in house through programs and through unit based ethics rounds. This multitude of programs allows clinicians at the MGH to have wide access to ethics education.

- **Education Resources**
 - The **Ethics Resource Web page** also provides a brief summary of the resources available and directions on how to initiate a consult.
 - **Educational offerings** are sponsored throughout the year by the Ethics Task Force, The Norman Knight Nursing Center for Clinical and Professional Development, the Ethics in Clinical Practice Committee, and the New Graduate in Critical Care Program.
 - Nurse ethicist Ellen Robinson, RN, PhD, and Alexandra Cist MD facilitate regular unit based **multidisciplinary rounds** in several patient care units and are available to facilitate discussion amongst clinicians for PRN consultation.
 - **Morbidity and Mortality Rounds** are open to all disciplines on the units, and provide opportunities for case discussion of end of life care issues.
 - **Ethics journals are available on-line** through the Treadwell Library, and the Ethics in Clinical Practice Committee and Ethics Task Force co-sponsor monthly Ethics Journal Club meetings.

- **Patient Rights** are highly respected and supported through a number of policies and processes.
 - **Confidentiality & Privacy** guidelines and policies regarding the access to and proper handling of written, verbal, or electronic information on patients. Staff members annually sign a non-disclosure statement during their annual reviews with their managers.
 - All patients are made aware of their right to obtain ethics consultation through the **Patient Handbook**
 - MGH supports advance care planning for their patients by initiating discussion regarding advance directives upon admission, and offering to educate and counsel patients who would like to learn about, and complete an advance directive.
 - **Self-Determination** which represents respect for each individual patient's goals and wishes regarding their care is supported through the process of informed consent for procedures, treatments and research protocols; Advance Directives; and the newly revised Limitation of Life-Sustaining Treatment and End of Life Care Policies. The Blum Patient & Family Learning Center is a resource rich area where patients, families and staff can obtain documents related to Advance Directives.

- **Employee Rights** are recognized and supported through several Clinical Policies.
 - **Nondiscrimination** – Employees whose personal values or religious beliefs conflict with a course of treatment may voice a conscientious objection to a manager/supervisor and reasonable efforts will be made to honor the request if care is not compromised.
 - **Grievances** – Written corrective actions can be grieved through meeting with the direct supervisor or manager, then department head, and finally Grievance Review Committee if resolution is not reached.
 - **Confidentiality** – Access to employee records is restricted and breaches are addressed through the Office of Patient Advocacy.

- **Conflict Management/ Resolution**
 - **The Office of Patient Advocacy and Office of General Counsel** are available as resources for patients, their families and staff.
 - **Resolving Conflict Policy** was recently set in place for clinical cases where consultations have failed to resolve disagreement about treatment planning amongst patients, families or staff.
 - **Human Resources & Employee Assistance Program** are other resources that staff can utilize to assist with conflict resolution.

- **Breaches in Conduct/ Impaired Caregivers**

MGH has policies in place that outline the Code of Conduct for all staff as well as circumstances that would question an employee's fitness to provide safe/competent care. Breaches should be reported to a direct manager or supervisor or can be directed 24 hours a day to the Compliance Hotline at 617-726-1446.