

# Moral Distress: When My Patient Makes Choices I Don't Understand

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# Presenter Disclosure

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# What is ethics?

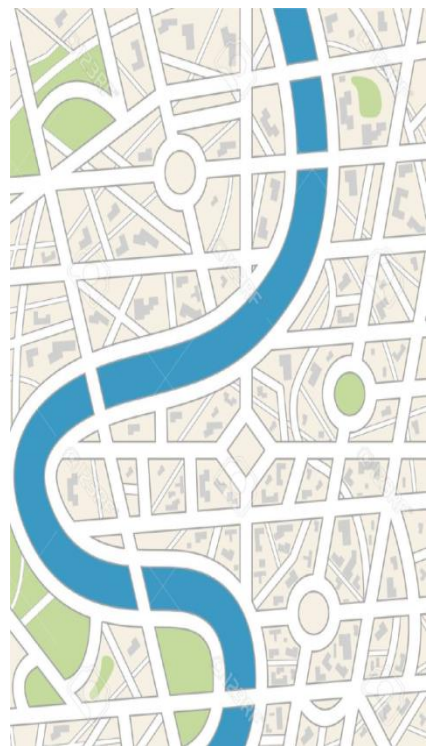
Ethics is about right and wrong and the reasons we give for our decisions and actions.

Ethics is an approach to decision making. It is about the criteria for deciding what is right and what is wrong, what is good and bad.

Ethics is a process for exploring and clarifying options.

Philip Hebert, *Doing Right*

# Ethical Dilemma



Choices are difficult when

- There is disagreement about what is important
- There is more than one option
- Each option is an unacceptable tradeoff
- Choosing one thing means another is impossible

Goal: to arrive at a solution that you can live with.

# Case Studies

- A young mom with treatable lymphoma declines chemo and radiation and opts to use natural supplements and chiropractic to treat her cancer.
- An 87-year-old man with progressing colon cancer requests his health care team do everything, including aggressive third line chemo and CPR
- A patient refuses to allow the health care team to share her diagnosis of advanced breast cancer with her family.

# Choices and Moral Distress

When choices are

- not in the patient's best interests.
- contrary to standards of practice.



# Moral distress

Knowing the right thing to do, but due to institutional constraints are unable to follow through.



# Moral distress

Pain or anguish affecting mind, body or relationships in response to a situation in which the person is:

- Aware of the moral problem
- Acknowledges moral responsibility
- Makes a moral judgment about the correct action
- Limited in their ability to act.



# Constraints

1. Clinical Situations
2. Factors internal to the caregiver
3. External/environmental factors



# Categories of Distress

Challenges, threats and violations of

- Professional Integrity
- Personal Integrity



# Examples of Moral Distress in Oncology

- Delays in treatment
- Suboptimal treatment
- Patients refusing recommended treatment
- Not enough time for patients
- Giving false hope
- Pain/distress not adequately controlled

# Signs of Moral Distress

Physical

Behavioral

Emotional

Spiritual



# Typical response

- Job dissatisfaction
- Disengage/Avoidance
- Judge/blame others
- Withdraw
- Leave profession
- Initiate positive change

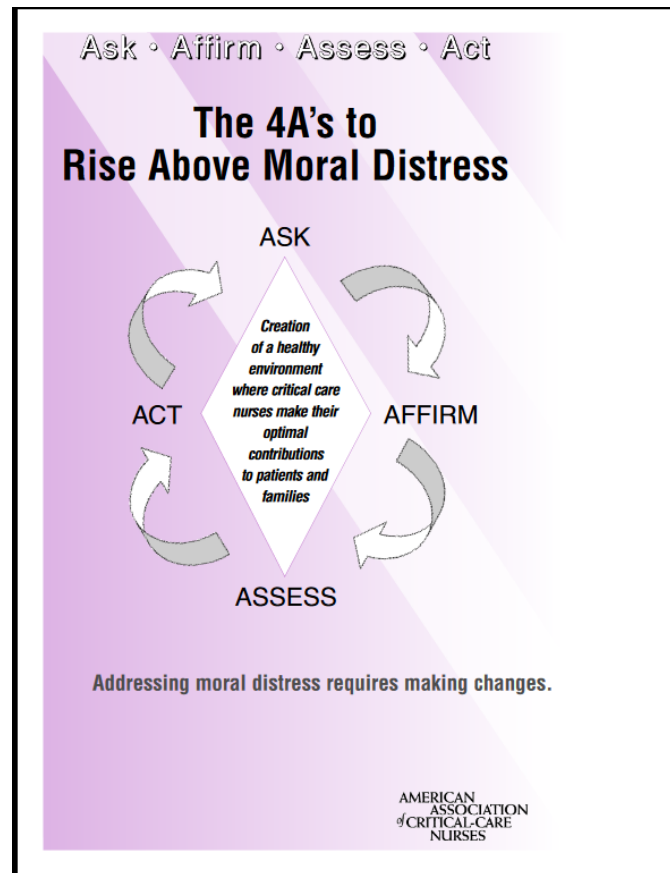


# Create safe places

- Debriefing sessions
- Communication
- Education

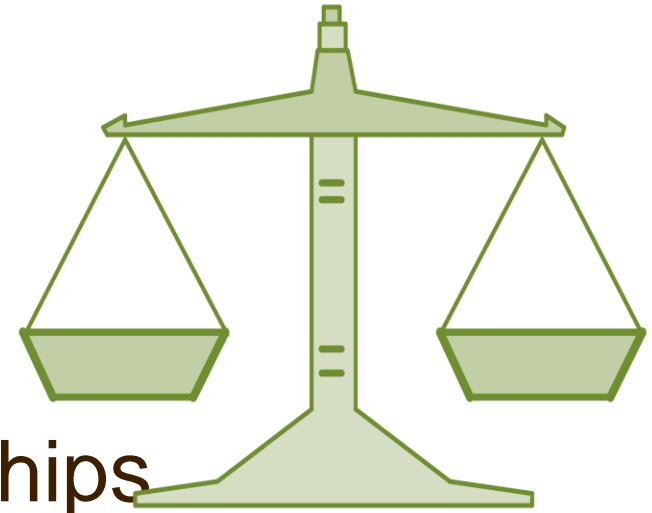


# The 4 A's To Rise Above Moral Distress



# Health

- Nutrition
- Sufficient sleep
- Adequate exercise
- Maintain healthy relationships
- Build self-confidence and competence
- Cultivate moral sensitivity





# Resilience

- Build self-awareness
- Identify sources of distress
- Learn ways to approach ethical problems
- Distinguish your needs from the patient's needs
- Enhance quality relationships
- Learn to accept there are things you can't change

# MBSR- Methods that Work

- Components of the Bundle of Mindfulness Interventions
- “being present in the moment and being without judgment”

Vaclavik et al. Clin J Oncol Nurs. 2018 Jun 1;22(3):326-332.

# MBSR Interventions

- Critical debriefs
- Code lavender bags:
  - Lavender sachet
  - Tissues
  - Words of encouragement from leadership team
  - Chocolate bar
  - Coffee shop gift card

Vaclavik et al. Clin J Oncol Nurs. 2018 Jun 1;22(3):326-332.

# MBSR Interventions

- Mindfulness sessions:
  - medical center's campus but away from the inpatient setting.
  - Breakfast was provided
  - deep breathing and relaxation
  - Continued weekly after 6 week course

Vaclavik et al. Clin J Oncol Nurs. 2018 Jun 1;22(3):326-332.

# MSBR Interventions

- Tree of life: celebrate patients' lives and placed on a wall of the break room
- Work–life balance committee
  - networking events
  - “What the Food” Wednesdays
  - Decorations and music
- Yoga classes

# Are there safe spaces for ethics?

Where do you go with an issue?

What's in place?

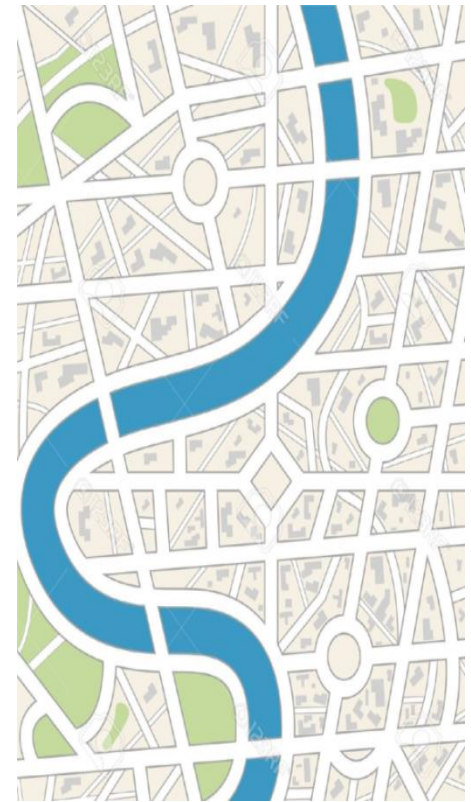
What's needed?

**What do I need to know about you in order to  
give you the best possible care?**

# How to raise an ethics issue

## Start with

- A trusted colleague
- A supervisor
- A professional code of ethics
- Decision-making frameworks



# WRHA Ethics Services

We can help too!

Call or email with your questions.

[ethics@wrha.mb.ca](mailto:ethics@wrha.mb.ca)

Or 204-926-7124