



Palliative Ethical Considerations

The foundation of medical ethics is supported by four pillars:

- **Autonomy** - patient has right to choose/refuse treatment
- **Beneficence** - doctor acts in best interest of patient
- **Non-maleficence** - first, do no harm
- **Justice** - equitable distribution of health resources¹

Moral dilemmas that often surround end-of-life decision making provide an excellent example of interdisciplinary issues that call for a collaborative approach²

Sources of Ethical Conflict in Patient Care:

- Complex healthcare information
- Different cultures, professional training, loyalties, practices, experience, perceptions
- Large Healthcare Team
- Rotation schedules (introduction and exiting of new team members and learners)
- Emotional complexity of illness experience
- Prognostic Uncertainty

Consider using a Framework to guide practice: Ethical Decision Making Framework

- Step 1:** Acknowledge your feelings
- Step 2:** Clearly identify the conflict
- Step 3:** Determine and collect all the relevant facts
- Step 4:** What are the options?
- Step 5:** Examine patient and others values
- Step 6:** Evaluate the Alternatives
- Step 7&8:** Make a choice, justify it and evaluate it³

Reference:

¹ Mohanti, B. K. (2009). Ethics in Palliative Care. *Indian Journal of Palliative Care*, 15(2), 89–92.

² Beauchamp T L, Childress J F. (2001). Principles of biomedical ethics. 5th ed. Oxford University Press.

³ St. Joseph's HealthCare (St. Mary's General Hospital): An Ethical Framework for Decision Making. 2008.