

MODULE 5: ETHICS

Cognitive Goals

At the completion of this module, the student-instructor should be able to:

- 5.1 Use their own words to define ethics and morals
- 5.2 Use their own words to identify and describe the basis of the six moral theories described in this module
- 5.3 Describe one strength and one weakness for each of the six moral theories described in this module
- 5.4 Identify sources of ethical mission statements for educational and emergency medical organizations
- 5.5 Describe attributes of an ethical instructor
- 5.6 List venues in education that should have ethical role models
- 5.7 Describe ways in which ethics can be incorporated into the EMS curricula

Psychomotor Goals:

- 5.1 Given a lesson plan or session topic, describe an activity that incorporates an ethical lesson into that session

Affective Goals

At the completion of this module, the student-instructor should be able to:

- 5.1 Defend the need to model ethical behavior as instructors

Declarative

- I. Why this module is important?
 - A. Ethics is an important part of medicine
 - B. Students will frequently be exposed to situations requiring ethical decisions
 - C. Medical advances are occurring faster than policies regarding medical ethics
- II. Bringing ethics into the classroom
 - A. Jump right in – ethics is a hot topic and students are interesting in talking about it
 - B. By introducing it into the course it suggests to students that it is an integral part of EMS
 - C. You are qualified to teach it more than you think – you know EMS and can easily think of times when an ethical question may arise
 - D. We all are ethical people (who follow various theories) and know the difference between right and wrong
 - E. You are teaching – not preaching
 1. Your role is to facilitate discussion
 - a. Introduce ethical issues, concepts and theories

- b. Challenge students to find ethical problems in an ethical issue or case study
- c. Guide students towards finding responsible answers or solutions to the problems posed

III. Module terminology

- A. Ethics, morals and values are difficult to define and many definitions are acceptable
 - 1. Ethics is generally thought of as the study of right action and morals is the system through which that action is applied
- B. Ethics
 - 1. The critical examination and evaluation of what is good, evil, right and wrong in human conduct (Guy, 2001)
 - 2. A specific set of principles, values and guidelines for a particular group or organization (Guy, 2001)
 - 3. Ethics is the study of goodness, right action and moral responsibility, it asks what choices and ends we ought to pursue and what moral principles should govern our pursuits and choices (Madden, 2000)
- C. Morals
 - 1. Those principles and values that actually guide, for better or worse, an individual's personal conduct (Guy, 2001)
 - 2. Morality is the informal system of rational beings by which they govern their behavior in order to lesson harm or evil and do good, this system, although informal, enjoys amazing agreement across time and cultures concerning moral rules, moral ideas and moral virtues (Madden, 2000)
- D. Values
 - 1. Where emphasis is placed and what is rewarded in an organization and society
 - 2. Guiding principles of behavior and conduct.
 - 3. The core motivator for behaviors

IV. Ethical theories

- A. In-depth knowledge is not required but it is important to have an understanding of some of the major theories to help shape classroom discussions
- B. Divine Law
 - 1. Based in many religions, primarily Judeo-Christian and Islamic
 - 2. What is considered good? God's will and word
 - 3. What is right behavior? Obeying God's will
 - 4. What are the strengths of this theory? Moral certainty and guidance
 - 5. What are some of the weaknesses of this theory? Moral certainty, self-righteousness and intolerance
- C. Virtue Ethics
 - 1. Based in ancient Greek philosophy: Plato and Aristotle
 - 2. What is considered good? Seeking happiness and living the good life
 - 3. What is right behavior? Acting virtuously which is necessary for happiness
 - 4. What are the strengths of this theory? Virtue is it's own reward and leads to self-actualization

5. What are some of the weaknesses of this theory? Consequences, the common good and principle are ignored
- D. Egoism
1. Based in classical and contemporary philosophy
 2. What is considered good? What I think is best for me is good
 3. What is right behavior? Promoting what is good for me only
 4. What are the strengths of this theory? Leads to moral certainty and moral autonomy
 5. What are some of the weaknesses of this theory? Self-centeredness, moral certainty, selfishness and unrealistic thinking
- E. Ethical Relativism
1. Based in classical and contemporary philosophy
 2. What is considered good? Only whatever the individual/group/culture decides is right is right
 3. What is right behavior? Acting in accord with the group's values and principles
 4. What are the strengths of this theory? Tolerance of others, flexible thinking and practicality
 5. What are some of the weaknesses of this theory? It rules out criticism of obvious evil and all is considered relative
- F. Utilitarianism
1. Based in British/American philosophy: Bentham and Kant
 2. What is considered good? Happiness/pleasure, diminishing misery and pain
 3. What is right behavior? Promoting the greatest good for the greatest number
 4. What are the strengths of this theory? Practical, considers consequences of actions
 5. What are some of the weaknesses of this theory? A good end may justify a bad means, it is often a vague theory, and justifies mistreatment of a minority group of people as the means to an end if they do not agree with the majority, it can be dehumanizing
- G. Duty Ethics
1. Based on theories by Kant
 2. What is considered good? Good will that is good-hearted and extended to others
 3. What is right behavior? Doing your moral duty and acting as a model for others to follow
 4. What are the strengths of this theory? Highly principled behavior, consistent and certain, showing respect for self and others
 5. What are some of the weaknesses of this theory? It ignores circumstances and principles and offers no way to choose among competing principles
- V. Guidelines for leading a discussion on ethics
- A. The appendix has information on some suggested classroom activities on ethical topics
 - B. The key in answering ethical questions is knowing when and where to ask the right questions.

1. What are the facts of this particular case?
 - a. Do I have everything I need to know or am I acting on rumor?
 - b. Am I letting bias or emotions distort the facts?
 - c. Is this primarily a legal or policy issue instead of an ethical one?
 2. Who is involved?
 - a. Who is responsible for causing this issue or problem?
 - b. Who is responsible for deciding what to do?
 - c. Who will be harmed or helped by the actions taken?
 3. Why have I chosen the ethical action I have?
 - a. What values and principles am I basing my decision upon?
- C. Set the tone for the discussion
1. Everyone who wants to speak may do so
 2. Students will respect each other's diversity of opinion
 3. Students will be polite to each other
 4. Students must back up their opinions with the facts as they see them, not just spout opinions
- VI. Ethical issues in teaching
- A. Plagiarism
 - B. Falsifying documentation
 - C. Cheating or academic dishonesty
 - D. Dangerous acts when treating actual patients
 - E. Unethical or inappropriate language or behavior with patients, families, and staff
 - F. Unacceptable classroom behavior such as violence, threats, harassment, etc
- VII. Dealing with ethical issues in teaching
- A. Foster a positive learning environment to minimize behavior problems
 - B. Model ethical behavior
 1. Appropriate dress
 2. Appropriate language
 3. Demonstrating concern and respect for others
 4. Commitment to academic excellence and lifelong learning
 - C. Publish classroom rules, policies, and expectations
 - D. Apply discipline or consequences consistently and fairly
 - E. Provide plenty of supervision, mentors, and role models

Bibliographical References

- Aiken, T. D. (2002). *Legal and ethical issues in Health Occupations*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company.
- Coughlin, S., Soskolne, C., and Goodmath, K. (1997). *Case Studies in Public Health Ethics*. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

- Edge, R., & Groves, J. (1999). *Ethics of Health Care* (2nd ed.). New York: Delmar Publishers.
- Flight, M. (1998). *Law, Liability, and Ethics* (3rd ed.). New York: Delmar Publishers.
- Goleman, Daniel. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Guy, Jr., Alfred H. (n.d.). *Successful Ways to Teach Ethics in any Discipline*.
- Madden, Theresa. (2000) *A Compendium of Ideas and Resources for Using Ethics Across the Curriculum*. Howard Community College.
- S. Coughlin, C. Soskolne, & K. Goodmath. (1997). *Case Studies in Public Health Ethics*. Washington, D.C.: American Public Health Association.