



How you want to be treated.

**Ethics Services**

# **ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS AT PROVIDENCE HEALTH CARE A DECISION MAKING GUIDE**

November 25, 2016

# Summary: Organizational Ethics Decision Making Guide

## Organizational Ethics at Providence Health Care

Ethics is the philosophical discipline that examines ideas about right and wrong. It is also the discipline that examines who we ought to be, how we should behave, and how we make decisions in light of who we say we are. Guided by our Mission, Vision, and Values, the Providence Health Care (PHC) Ethics Framework is an effective tool for organization level or system level decision making. Ethics Services welcomes the opportunity to assist in “Mission Due Diligence,” that is, in helping to ensure that system level decision making is aligned with our Mission, Vision, and Values, and strategic directions.

## Is Formal Organizational Ethics Decision Making Required?

Not every system level decision requires an ethics consultation. However some issues ought to trigger more formal ethical reflection. Decisions that risk harm to or significantly impact the lives of those we serve, affect our reputation as an organization, or affect our Catholic identity deserve careful consideration.

## The PHC Ethics Framework

The PHC Ethics Framework can be used as a guide for system level decision making.

### Step 1: Identify the Issues

Identify key issues.

Describe the issue(s) in ethical terms.

### Step 2: Identify the Stakeholders

Identify stakeholders—be as inclusive as possible.

Include the individuals who have authority to implement the decision and who are accountable for the decision.

### Step 3: Acknowledge Reactions, Feelings and World Views

What “gut” reactions (positive or negative) and “world views” need to be acknowledged?

### Step 4: Gather and Clarify the Facts

Establish what we know about the issue.

Try to determine what we must still ascertain.

## Step 5: Analysis in light of Mission, Vision, Values, and Normative Principles

Identify pre-existing normative guidance (precedent cases, legal directives, direction from the *Health Ethics Guide*). What normative principles are in play, which are in conflict, and which carry more weight?

1. Compassion
2. Social Justice
3. Respect Sacredness of Human Life
4. Support Spiritual Needs and Faith Traditions
5. Accountability and Transparency
6. Fairness/ Distributive Justice
7. Stewardship
8. Excellence
9. Just Workplace
10. Commitment to Research and Innovation

## Step 6: Identify Options and Weigh Against Values and Principles

Identify which options are available and how they fit with PHC values, and the normative principles. Identify which option **best** supports organizational values and ethical principles.

## Step 7: Make a Decision

State clearly what the decision is, and why it is the best option in light of the above. Identify contingency plans in case of unintended outcomes or unforeseen problems.

## Step 8: Implement, and Evaluate a Decision

Develop a plan for communication and implementation. Review decisions, outcomes, and key learnings.

## You Are Not Alone: We Are Here To Help

Complex ethical decision making should not be done in isolation. Consider reaching out to other PHC services such as: Spiritual Health, Patient Relations, Risk Management. If you would like a formal consultation you can reach our office by emailing [ethics@providencehealth.bc.ca](mailto:ethics@providencehealth.bc.ca).

# Organizational Ethics at Providence Health Care

## Introduction

Ethics is the philosophical discipline that examines ideas about right and wrong. It is also the discipline that examines who we ought to be, how we should behave, and how we make decisions in light of who we say we are. At Providence Health Care (PHC), we believe that ethics touches everyone and everything. Accordingly, Ethics Services at PHC seeks to bring the best of our wisdom and lived experience to our work by placing ethical reflection and discussion at the centre of all our activities. Our Mission, Vision, and Values are at the centre of who we are and how we act whether the issue at hand is how best to respond to a medical emergency; make difficult treatment decisions in clinical or residential care; manage disagreements between care providers, patients, residents, or families; allocate scarce resources fairly; support innovative research and teaching; or support the individuals, teams, programs and the organization as a whole in living with integrity.

Ethics Services is committed to helping individuals and groups within the organization to think carefully about the values that we live by, and to make decisions and take actions that are rooted in these values. A central part of this examination involves questions around what we ought to do, and how we should behave at an organizational level. This document, developed by PHC Ethics Services, outlines a framework for ethical decision making at the organization or system level. When ethical issues arise, our team can help. This document outlines our basic strategies: working with individuals and teams we identify issues and stakeholders, organize essential information, clarify values and principles relevant to the problem, and by means of ethical reflection and discussion, help find options and make decisions that best support the team and the organization.

## Organizational Ethics, Mission Due Diligence

Providence Health Care strives to deliver the highest quality health care by staying true to Catholic values and teaching. Organizational ethics is the discipline concerned with the principles and standards by which an organization, such as PHC, operates. The focus of organizational ethics is on system level decisions that affect the entire organization, and finding the “right” way to respond to complex challenges and opportunities in the community and populations we serve. It is important to note that some system level problems have “clinical” solutions or involve decisions that will impact clinical care, and some bed-side clinical problems may demand system level solutions. In such instances it is important to consider the document *Clinical Ethics at PHC*.

Mission Due Diligence is an introspective and deliberate process of examining decisions in light of PHC’s Mission, Vision, and Values. While much is made of financial due diligence (ensuring decisions are financially sound), and legal due diligence (ensuring decisions are legally sound), it is in the organization’s interest to perform the same introspection in ensuring that system level decisions are done in accord with PHC’s Mission, Vision, and Values.

## Ethical Decision Making and Discernment

Ethical decision making involves determining a preferred choice among competing options. That option may be about both the goal that is sought, as well as the means by which the goal is achieved. Ethical decision making is distinguished by an intentional focus on naming and being explicit about the values and principles that inform choices. No matter how simple or complex, each decision will credit certain

operative values (those things that are important to us), and appeal to certain principles (the basic moral rules that guide us). Making *system level* values and principles explicit, informs what we *ought* to do as an organization. This value and principle based analysis is helpful to ensure alignment between what we say is important to us as an organization, and what we do.

Discernment is important in the Catholic tradition. Discernment is a process of making careful distinctions in thinking about truth in a Catholic context. It is an introspective undertaking aimed at making decisions that are morally correct and in accord with God’s will. Discernment involves deliberate contemplation, prayer, or meditation on the problem at hand and weighing the options that present themselves.

Ethical decision making and discernment are not only practical decision making processes, they foster leadership development and fidelity to broad organizational values, including our Catholic identity.

## This Document

Decisions that significantly impact the lives of those we serve or affect our reputation as an organization, either positively or negatively, deserve careful consideration. This document describes a process by which to use the Providence Health Care Ethics Framework as it applies to Organizational Ethics. This guide is not prescriptive, nor can it be used in place of leaders’ experience and professional judgment. Rather, the process outlined herein is a proactive and preventative ethics strategy to ensure consistency in decision making, and to help PHC leaders make major clinical, operational, administrative, and strategic decisions informed by our Mission, Vision, and Values. This guide may also be used as part of a business case proposal, root cause analysis, financial planning or in developing strategic aims. In sum, it is a tool to aid ethical decision making and “discernment”, and enable “Mission Due Diligence”.

## Foundations: Mission, Vision, Values, and Principles

Values underpin all that we do. Our values are a measure of, and statement about what is important to us. Common values, help shape principles. Principles are mutually agreed upon “rules” that guide right action and behaviour. All system level decision making must begin with an understanding of, embark from, and be in alignment with our Mission, Vision, and Values.

### Mission

Inspired by the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, Providence Health Care is a Catholic health care community dedicated to meeting the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of those served through compassionate care, teaching and research.

### Vision

Driven by compassion and social justice, we are at the forefront of exceptional care and innovation.

### Values

**Spirituality** – We nurture the God-given creativity, love and compassion that dwells within us all.

**Integrity** – We build our relationships on honesty, justice and fairness.

**Stewardship** – We share accountability for the well-being of our community.

**Trust** – We behave in ways that promote safety, inclusion and support.

**Excellence** – We achieve excellence through learning and continuous improvement.

**Respect** – We respect the diversity, dignity and interdependence of all persons.

## The Health Ethics Guide

The *Health Ethics Guide (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)* (Catholic Health Alliance of Canada, 2012) is a book intended to provide moral guidance around new advances in science and health care, in accordance with Roman Catholic teaching. Amended from time to time, it provides pragmatic advice for ethical decision making in Catholic health care in the context of a modern and ever changing world. It is a foundational reference for Ethics Services for both clinical and system level decision making at PHC. Chapter 1: The Social Nature of Care, and Chapter 7: Governance and Administration, are particularly relevant to organizational ethics.

## Normative Principles in Organizational Ethics

The following are a set of normative principles that can help guide decision making. “Normative” refers to commonly accepted notions of how we *ought* to behave, or what we *should* do. Principles are generally agreed upon “rules” that guide right action and behaviour. These principles are derived from organizational ethics literature, and grounded in the PHC Mission, Vision, and Values and Catholic teaching.

- 1) Act with **compassion**.
  - Think always of people first. The primary purpose of the organization is to serve people and populations.
  - Keep before us the statement “How you want to be treated” in all dealings with the people we serve and with each other.
  - Provide physical, emotional, and spiritual support to those who suffer.
  - Take time to listen.
- 2) Promote **social justice**.
  - Attend first to the needs of the most vulnerable.
  - Listen to those on the margins of society.
  - Attend to our populations of emphasis.
  - Be the voice for those who have none.
- 3) Respect the **sacredness of human life** and promote human flourishing.
  - Promote the intrinsic dignity and the sacredness of life from conception through to natural death.
  - Bring a human dimension and perspective to all hospital environments.
  - Foster an environment of mutual concern and respect.
- 4) Support the **spiritual needs, faith traditions**, and rituals of those with whom we serve and work.
  - Respect and maintain a commitment to our Catholic identity, including its symbols.
  - Be considerate and inclusive of the religious traditions and spiritual experience of others.
  - Review and plan actions to improve the spiritual well-being of patients, residents, and staff.
  - Act in a way that is consistent with the guidance of the *Health Ethics Guide*.
- 5) Build **trust** through **accountability** and **transparency**.

- Act with honesty, fairness, transparency, and integrity: say what we mean, mean what we say, and do what we say we are going to do.
- Maintain the relationship of trust and care between our organization, and those we serve by acting consistently and according to a justified and transparent set of values.
- Strive for solidarity and cooperation by working together with those we serve. Consider the short and long term consequences to those affected by our decisions.
- Take responsibility and be accountable for oneself and the decisions one is part of.

6) Promote **fairness** and **distributive justice**.

- Consider the greatest good for the greatest number, but strive for “equitable” distribution of resources: because all people are morally equal, the fairest distribution of health care may be unequal and favour those who need the resources the most.
- Aim to fairly distribute not only the goods of society and our health care system, but also fairly distribute harms, risks, and burdens when there are resource allocation decisions to be made.
- Recognize that individual rights (such as autonomy) may need to be balanced with the needs of the greater community. Impositions on individual rights and freedoms must be by the least restrictive and coercive means possible.

7) Promote good **stewardship**.

- Aim at prevention by addressing upstream and root causes of ill health, and providing things necessary for good health and well-being.
- Promote decisions and actions that are effective and accomplish their intended goals. This includes acting decisively and in a timely manner.
- Be cost effective in delivering safe, quality care. Work with strategic and financial objectives in mind, and link plans to PHC Strategic Directions.
- Promote decisions and actions that are sustainable.
- Promote operational efficiency including maximum resource conservation. Consider all resources, human and material. Preserve natural and environmental resources.
- Work with other agencies, health authorities and our sister CHAC organizations to maximize success and harmonize efforts. We can achieve more through collaboration than working alone.

8) Strive for clinical, academic, and administrative **excellence** in all we do.

- Strive always to make decisions that achieve the greatest good, and impose the least risk of harm.
- Place organizational goals above personal priorities.
- Recognize and uphold professional practice standards and best practices.
- Seek evaluation and feedback, and incorporate results into future behavior and actions.
- Conduct quality reviews and measure outcomes that inform future decisions.

9) Cultivate a **just workplace**.

- Treat personnel fairly, respectfully, and without discrimination.

- Establish employee employer relations (including services that are contracted out) in alignment with PHC's Mission, Vision, and Values, and in keeping with the *Health Ethics Guide*.
- Cultivate and celebrate a diversity of skill sets, acknowledge individual expertise, and respect professional judgment of PHC staff.
- Promote effective collaboration between administration and employee unions and associations.

10) Commit to the future through **research**, **innovation**, and **education** of future professionals.

- Promote a climate where people are encouraged to question current practice.
- Support innovation through research. Publish learnings and participate in effective knowledge translation of results.
- Promote teaching and learning. Maintain our affiliations with institutes of higher learning.

## Decision Making Process

### Triggers

The first step in the ethical decision making process is knowing when to undertake a formal ethical reflection or analysis in order to ensure Mission Due Diligence. Some issues definitely require us to **stop** and take sufficient time to weigh all the aspects of the issue until a formal ethical consideration is made. In some cases, this may even cause us to abandon an initiative or reverse a decision. Some issues raise doubt and uncertainty that may make us **slow down** or proceed more cautiously before making a decision. Some scenarios may benefit from a discernment process to support the communication or implementation of the decision when we feel that we can **proceed with confidence**. What follows is not an exhaustive list of issues or situations that should trigger an organizational ethics consult. Furthermore, not every system level decision requires a detailed ethics consultation, and some decisions which do not require a formal consult may still benefit from taking some time to reflect on this process if only to ensure that all perspectives have been heard, or all options identified. Some of the things that might trigger an organizational ethics consult include:

- Issues where there is risk of harm to the individuals or populations we serve
- Issues that risk damaging the reputation of the organization
- Issues which conflict with the *Health Ethics Guide* or Catholic moral teaching and thereby threaten our Catholic identity and our relationship with the Church
- Situations where there is disagreement or a clash of values over decisions which will take the organization in new directions (mergers, partnerships, program development or service line closure, significant commitment of human resource or financial capital).
- Review or update of the organization's Mission, Vision, and Values, or strategic directions.
- Decisions which involve significant political, funder, donor or community pressures that conflict with our values
- Issues which require focused ethical review to ensure all stakeholders have been heard, and all options have been considered
- To provide confidence and support for major decisions, and to aid with the communications and roll out of new plans

## PHC Ethics Framework

If an ethical issue is identified, and the process triggered, ethics consultation and this guide ought to be employed as early as possible in the decision making process. The PHC Ethics Framework can be adapted to organization or system level ethical decision making. The steps outlined are not always linear: steps may run in parallel, steps may not run in order, and the process may loop back on itself in light of new information. A place to start, and a common methodology, ensure consistency among decision makers and ensure that no crucial steps are missed. What follows are several questions and considerations to prompt decision makers at each step in the framework.

### 1. Identify the Issues

Being clear about the question to resolve is essential to good decision making. Any one issue may raise additional questions that may or may not be related to the issue at hand. Good decision making requires that we stay focused on the issue(s) that demand the most attention at this time.

- Is the goal at hand to help leaders come to a decision, to confirm a decision already made, or determine how best to communicate a decision?
- Are there multiple issues at play that require our attention, and if so, which is the most important issue to address?
- Is the issue the same for the organization, the funder, the patient/resident? Whose issue is most relevant for this particular decision making process?

### 2. Identify the Stakeholders

Proper decision making seeks the wisdom of multiple stakeholder opinions and perspectives to ensure a balanced and informed decision. This is especially important when there may be power differentials or resistance to seek input from certain sectors. Team cultures, time pressures and meeting schedules should be respected in setting up the decision making exercise and engaging participants if a formal organizational ethics consultation is to be undertaken.

- Whose issue is this? Who is concerned at the organization level about the issue and who (employees or people in our care) will be affected by decisions being made?
- Whom do we still need to consult to ensure a balanced decision?
- What is our purpose for consulting others – to seek input, to debate, or to inform?
- Who has the authority to affect change or implement the decision once it is made?
- Who is accountable for this decision? Who will be the final arbiter of this decision?

### 3. Acknowledge Reactions, Feelings and World Views

Often our “gut” reactions towards an issue are revealing. Our “world view” (that is, our basic convictions that we take for granted about meaning in the world) also informs our decision making. Acknowledging all stakeholders’ voices requires openness and sometimes, moral courage.

- What do strong reactions about an issue reveal about its importance for our group’s consideration?
- In what way do our feelings, history, and experience help clarify or confuse subtleties around an issue?

- Is the decision making group free to name their own biases and internal power differentials? Are there some stakeholders who may be emotionally or psychologically unable to freely engage with this issue?
- What perspectives dominate the group discussion? What perspectives are negated?
- Is there emotional residue around a particular issue that distorts or gets in the way of good decision making? In what ways does our passion around certain issues help or hinder good decision making?
- What biases, loyalties, and conflicts of interest are operative that need to be acknowledged, understood, and managed?

#### 4. Gather and Clarify the Facts

Good decision making is possible only if we have a grasp of the facts. Paying attention to what is undisputed fact versus assumption, hearsay or opinion is one of the most important “sift and sort” steps of discernment, and making good system level decisions.

- Establish what we know about an issue, including key contextual background information. What information is essential to making a decision confidently?
- Establish what we do not know and what still needs to be ascertained before making a decision. Consider whether stating a need for information is merely avoiding a difficult decision.
- What other information is relevant and available to help understand this issue (i.e., legal, financial, clinical, legislative, ecclesial, social, historical)?
- What data is irrelevant and risks confusing or confounding the issue and should be laid aside?
- Consider new information at every step of this process and whether it changes the process and the nature of the very question to be resolved.

#### 5. Analysis in light of Mission, Vision, Values and Normative Principles

Often there is pre-existing normative guidance on matters that require discernment.

- Has there been a previous related decision making process that we can draw upon and benefit from its documented analyses?
- Does the *Health Ethics Guide* already provide authoritative direction to make this decision?
- If leaders are presented with something they must seemingly comply with without any choice (i.e., a legislative requirement, deficit reduction, closing a program), is there still a role for discernment in how we will implement the changes?

As a Catholic health care organization, our Mission, Vision, and Values are our fundamental reference points. In addition, we also look to other relevant sources of normative guidance such as legal and regulatory requirements, and guidance from ethics scholars. From these we derive ethical principles that inform decision making. While multiple values and principles may be at play, it is important to identify which of the values and which of the 10 principles may be most relevant to a situation. Ethical decision making often requires balancing of values and principles (for example promoting social justice but practicing good stewardship).

- Is there a shared understanding of the meaning and implications of the values and principles?
- What value(s) or principle(s) carry more weight among the possible options, and is there consensus on this point? Is there capacity to publicly acknowledge this?

- What are the limiting factors or non-negotiables regarding this issue that must be respected and publicly defended?

## 6. Identify Options and Weigh Against Values and Principles

Ethical decision making often identifies new unexplored options, possibilities, and opportunities worthy of the team's consideration. Far from an academic exercise, discernment and organizational ethics decision making can advance fulfillment of our strategic priorities and compel a team to courageous action.

- What possible courses of action exist, including the conscious decision of doing nothing? Be creative and thorough in developing options.
- Which options are inspired by, and in turn support, the various values, principles, and strategic aims?
- How do possible options align with our own personal values? Is there conflict that can trigger moral distress?
- How do the proposed options reflect and help us demonstrate the Mission, Vision, and Values of PHC?
- Is there resistance to pursue an option simply because it is inconvenient or more onerous?
- Is it tempting to back away from an option because of the financial, political, capital or human resource implications? Is this a legitimate limiting factor signalling that further discernment is required?

## 7. Make a Decision

At the end of the discernment or ethical decision making process, a decision must be made. At this juncture there are still some important considerations about both the decision and the process of moving forward.

- Which option is most aligned with our Mission, Vision and Values? Which option best advances the PHC Strategic Plan?
- What feelings and energy are evoked among participants in going forward with this decision?
- Do we anticipate the decision may cause unease with participants the next day/week/month, or in the face of possible criticism?
- Are we able to publicly defend the decision in the media, at staff forums, with colleagues, when looking ourselves in the mirror? Can we live with this decision, even if it is difficult, unpopular, or inexpedient, knowing it is still the best choice given all the circumstances?
- Is there a contingency plan in case the decision does not bring about the intended outcomes or raises unanticipated hardship or harm?
- Document the discussions and the decision as appropriate.

## 8. Implement and Evaluate the Decision

Once a decision is made, it must be put into action and evaluated. Doing the right thing means not just making an ethically sound decision, but involves ethically sound implementation, and a commitment to learn from and evaluate decisions and actions.

- How will the plan be executed in accord with the Mission, Vision, and Values? How will this alignment be made explicit?
- Who will implement and document this decision, by what process, and within what timelines?

- What key messages need to be reflected in communication strategies? What kinds of venues are required for discussing the decision and answering staff and/or media inquiries?
- What process and criteria for measuring will be used to evaluate the decision and outcome?
- How will the decision maker articulate their accountability for the decision, including monitoring the impact of the decision against the aims and values that factored in the discernment?
- What implementation milestones serve as potential decision points for making adjustments or evoking contingency planning?
- Is this decision for only a specified period of time or is it perceived to be enduring? When would we know we are “done” with this issue?
- What are the conditions under which the decision needs to be revisited?
- What went well and is worthy of repeating? What didn’t work well and should be avoided? What did we learn about our team process and our capacity for decision making?
- What is the broader relevance of this decision? What are the consequences or impact of the decision elsewhere in the health care system if it were to be applied consistently?
- What has this decision revealed about the operative values (versus the espoused values) of the organization?

## Other Resources

Complex ethical decision making should not be done in isolation. There are other resources to call upon in managing these issues. Reaching out to colleagues is a good first step. In addition to ethics, consider calling other PHC services such as: Spiritual Health, Patient Relations, Legal, and Risk Management. Several corporate policies and guidelines may have bearing on decision making, with respect to system level decision making consider PHC’s policies on the “Respectful Workplace”.

## What to Expect from an Organizational Ethics Consultation

At Providence, we believe that ethics touches everyone and everything. Accordingly, Ethics Services at PHC seeks to bring the best of our wisdom and lived experience to our work by placing ethical reflection and discussion at the centre of all our activities. If you feel that an ethics consult is necessary, we will do our best to meet with you and your team in a timely manner to help you with your ethical issues. Our team is respectful to all parties to an issue. We provide opinions and insight but do not force decisions on any one, but rather work with teams and individuals to make the most of the knowledge and expertise they already possess. We will draw upon scholarly sources and research, and our own experience to stimulate ethical reflection and discussion in order to help you with your problem. The process outlined in the pages above is aimed at finding ethically sound solutions to new or emerging issues, or recurring problems. Our role is to make the ethical dimensions of an issue explicit, clarify the values and principles that are in tension, and help teams or individuals to find options that best support their needs. The service is also offered to assist staff, patients/residents/families, or teams reflect on and understand the ethical dimensions of decisions already made.