

Educational Resource Packs for Clinical Ethics Committees

Pack one Ethics and the vulnerable patient

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Introduction to the ethics education resource pack

This resource pack is designed to be used by a clinical ethics committee or group (CEC) in discussion in a meeting. It aims to provide an effective and flexible method for self education of the CEC and to facilitate the group working together. Although members of the CEC are asked to do some reading prior to the meeting at which this resource pack is to be used, it is not designed for private study alone.

This resource pack provides an introduction to the ethical issues arising in the care and treatment of vulnerable patients. It is therefore most useful for ethics committees /groups that are starting to work together to discuss these issues.

What is included in the resource pack?

The resource pack comprises the following documentation:

- Suggested pre meeting reading (available online from Journal of Medical Ethics www.jme.bmjournals.com :

Mark Komrad, A defence of medical paternalism: maximising patient autonomy Journal of Medical Ethics 1983, 9, 38 -44

Shimon Glick, The morality of coercion, Journal of medical Ethics 2000; 26: 393 – 395

Introduction to moral theories and principles that inform ethical decision-making in healthcare

- Specific ethical issues relevant to the care and treatment of vulnerable patients
- Case study
- A structured approach to case consultation
- Issues to consider

How to use the resource pack

It will take about one hour to use this resource pack in a meeting of the CEC.

The idea is that the resource pack will provide tools to facilitate ethical discussion of the case study.

The **pre meeting reading** will provide background information on this topic. Two articles are included and a document entitled 'Introduction to Moral Theories and principles that inform ethical decision-making in healthcare'.

The chair or administrator should send a copy of all three documents to each member of the CEC who will attend the meeting, two weeks in advance. Members should read and familiarise themselves with the issues.

At the meeting the **case study** should be considered by the CEC. Using the resources provided to inform the discussion the committee should come to a decision on the most ethically appropriate course of action in this case. The CEC should consider:

- Whether any more information is needed
- What are the ethical issues
- The process of ethical discussion - use of ethical frameworks / counter arguments / case comparison

In considering the case study the CEC may find it helpful to refer to the following documents included in this pack:

- Specific ethical issues relevant to the care and treatment of vulnerable patients
- A structured approach to case consultation
- Issues to consider

These documents do not attempt to provide a definitive answer, nor do they provide a comprehensive list of every ethical issue arising. Rather this ethics education resource pack aims to develop and facilitate the skills of the CEC (and a CEC with experience in this area may simply wish to use the case study as a basis for discussion).

The process of decision making

As important as the consideration of ethical issues and the development of ethical argument is the **process** of discussion. In discussing ethical issues the CEC should adopt a process that is transparent and can be subject to critical appraisal. In this context it may wish to consider the following:

- The role of Chair in ensuring contribution of all views
- If the CEC can justify and test its views by use of counter-argument

Further information

In addition, this resource pack includes:

- Further reading
- Websites and contact groups
- Professional guidance

We hope you find this resource pack helpful as a tool in providing the ethics education to members of the CEC. Two other packs are available on Ethics & Genetics and Ethics & Resource Allocation. For copies of these packs and further information please contact:

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