

# American Osteopathic College of Occupational and Preventive Medicine 2015 Mid Year Educational Conference, Ft Lauderdale, Florida

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COLLEGE OF MEDICINE  
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**Public Health Ethical Principles:  
Making Ethical Decisions**

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## Session Objectives

- Consider the natural ethical tensions underlying public health practice
- Review seven ethical principles with specific relevance to public health practitioners
- Apply ethical principles to an example of a public health situation requiring a decision

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## FACING ETHICAL DECISIONS

- What constitutes a good and bad choice?
- What do we value?
- Trade-offs?
- What are our "norms"?



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## Beyond Medical Ethics

Public Health:

Balancing and coming to conclusions about the rights and duties of individuals, communities, populations and governments with regard to protecting and maintaining health

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## What do we understand about ethics?



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"Rules are often inadequate to cover complex situations at times they come into conflict, and they are frequently difficult to interpret or apply. Broader ethical principles will provide a basis on which specific rules maybe formulated, criticised and interpreted"

The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. 1979

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## Seven Ethical Principles

<p><b>Non-Maleficence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>PRIMUM NIL NOCERE!</i></li> <li>o Omit harmful activities</li> <li>o Occasions where degrees of harm are 'traded off' against the possibilities of greater harms or benefits</li> </ul>	<p><b>Beneficence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Obligation to produce benefit</li> <li>o Physicians heal and help patients according to abilities and judgment</li> <li>o Active contribution to welfare of others</li> </ul>
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Dent MM, Boltri J, Okosun IS, Acad Med 2004

## Seven Ethical Principles

<p><b>Health Maximization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Seeks health of broader constituency of the public, and health improvements</li> <li>o Produce benefit in a wider sense, obligation is social beneficence</li> <li>o Maximize health in the population you are responsible for</li> </ul>	<p><b>Efficiency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o More health needs than resources – worldwide lack of resources</li> <li>o Use evidence-base and performance of cost-benefit analysis to decide what should be done and how to do it</li> <li>o Complex – beyond effectiveness</li> </ul>
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## Seven Ethical Principles

<p><b>Respect for Autonomy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Respect for the wishes of the individual patient served</li> <li>o Every person has a high value, cannot overlook for the good of another</li> <li>o If restricting autonomy for wider public health goals, burden of proof on those advocating for restriction</li> </ul>	<p><b>Justice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o All have equal moral worth – fairness</li> <li>o Equal treatment, health opportunities, and distribution of health outcomes 'health equity'</li> <li>o Health of all citizens protected as much as possible – burden of proof when unequal treatment</li> </ul>
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## Seven Ethical Principles:

**Proportionality**

- o Weighing and balancing individual freedom against wider social goods proportionally
- o Public health benefits outweigh infringed general moral considerations



## Apply to an example:

- o Health Department Leader of Communicable Disease Control of State X
- o Head of government asks whether exemptions for measles immunization should be eliminated (only medical)
- o 2 children dies in recent outbreak
- o Insufficient immunization rates (1<sup>st</sup> dose - 70%, 2<sup>nd</sup> dose – 60%)
- o Will take her advice seriously

## Principles Checklist:

- o What are ethical challenges within this case?
  - Look at each principle on the handout and consider whether it is a challenge in this case.
- o \*Schroder-Back et al. 2014

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Group Feedback:

Questions?  
Thank you!

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## Principles Checklist/Memory Aid

Adapted from:

Schroder-Back et al. **Teaching seven principles for public health ethics: towards a curriculum for a short course on ethics in public health programmes.** *BMC Medical Ethics*. 2014, 15:73

### **Non-Maleficence**

Will no one be harmed by the proposed intervention?

Are children and vulnerable populations especially protected?

### **Beneficence**

Is the intervention of any good to every single person taking part?

Do benefits outweigh harms – either by intervening or not intervening?

### **Health Maximization**

Is intervention effective and evidence based?

Does the intervention improve population health?

Does it have a sustainable, long-term effect on public health?

Is there added value to the community?

### **Efficiency**

Is the proposed intervention cost-effective?

Awareness of scarcity of public money (use saved for other purpose)

### **Respect for Autonomy**

Does the intervention refrain from using coercion and manipulation?

Does the intervention foster free choice?

Is informed consent required to participate in the intervention?

Is self-responsibility demanded and possible for every person?

Are privacy and personal data respected?

Does the intervention avoid paternalism, (if needed is it justified)?

Does the intervention promote autonomy?

### **Justice**

Does the intervention avoid stigmatizing, discriminating against or  
exclude any sub-population (from social benefits or health care)?

Is the supporting institution publicly justified and transparent?

Are social and health inequities exacerbated or improved?

Are vulnerable sub-populations considered and supported?

Is equality of opportunity and participation in social action promoted?

Is there an erosion of social cohesion and solidarity?

### **Proportionality**

Does the intervention avoid infringing on possible alternatives?

Are costs and utility proportional?

## **Steps of Applied Ethical Reasoning**

Adapted from:

Schroder-Back et al. **Teaching seven principles for public health ethics: towards a curriculum for a short course on ethics in public health programmes.** *BMC Medical Ethics*. 2014, 15:73

1. Identify and frame in your own words: What is underlying moral conflict?
2. Identify and frame in ethical words: Which ethical principles are relevant, how can they be specified and might they be in conflict to each-other?
3. Delve deeper in to issues: Do I have all relevant information? Can I get more background information to understand all particularities?
4. Are alternative solutions feasible with less moral issues/costs?
5. Further specification: Do the specifications change with more information?
6. Weighing priorities: Are conflicting principles and their specifications of equal value?
7. Conclusions drawn: Following specification and weighing, which solution is preferred?
8. Integrity: Can I personally accept the conclusion drawn?
9. Act and convince: Are my actions consistent with my judgments and can I convince others based on ethical reasoning?