



## 6th International Conference on Clinical Ethics Consultation

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[www.ethics2010.org](http://www.ethics2010.org)



### Abstract Submission Form – Major Papers

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Proposed title of paper: Crucial Skills for Clinical Ethics Consultation

Abstract with 3 clearly stated objectives in 250 words:

Over 9 years and 1500 clinical ethics consultations, I have been taking note of what skills seem to be demanded by the situations I have entered. This paper is an attempt to articulate and describe these skills, indicate why they are key to the work of a clinical ethicist, and suggest how they might be taught and modelled for others. Each of these skills ought to be initially acquired through graduate level education, and then honed and developed with supervised experience in clinical settings.

A list of key skills for clinical ethics consultation includes:

1. The ability to recognize and categorize ethical issues, by being familiar with the common themes that create moral distress and moral dilemmas in clinical settings.
2. Knowing what information needs to be gathered, and how to do so appropriately and sensitively.
3. The ability to analyze issues clearly and thoroughly, from a variety of perspectives and with different methods.
4. The ability to communicate effectively, both interpersonally and in writing.
5. The ability to mediate effectively - to suggest reasonable compromises and possible solutions.
6. The ability to articulate how this problem appears from the perspectives of each of the actors involved.
7. The ability to be fair and balanced at all times, and trustworthy.

8. The ability to listen effectively.

9. The ability to teach effectively, both in formal and informal settings.

What significant contribution to the field of clinical ethics consultation does this presentation make?  
(250 words)

I have just attended the annual meeting of the ASBH, where I witnessed a great deal of differing understandings about what a clinical ethicist ought to do. My response is to provide this overview of the skills I have developed over 9 years of clinical ethics practice, after 5 years in a doctoral program in comparative religion and bioethics. Our clinical ethics consultation service flourished in our hospital under the organizational domain of supportive care services, and feedback from staff, physicians, patients, and families is consistently positive. Effective clinical ethics consultation requires, first and foremost, familiarity with the types of issues that challenge the ethical sensibilities of patients and providers. These include: withholding and withdrawal of treatment, artificial feeding in dying patients, decision-making for patients with marginal capacity, disagreements or misunderstandings about the goals of treatment, resuscitation of patients with minimal likelihood of improvement, disagreements among patient care teams, and knowledge of when others, such as colleagues and ethics committees, ought to become a part of the consultation process.

Ethics consultations can take a variety of forms, from quick discussions, to brief reviews of charts and written observations or recommendations, to involved processes where many individuals are engaged, to pre-arranged meetings of teams and families in order to review the situation and move forward.

Ethics consultants can bring a moral orientation from many different sources - from philosophical ethics, to religiously-based ethics, to legal orientations, to old fashioned common sense, but regardless of background, ethics consultants need to be familiar with how clinical issues commonly play out in the real world. They need to be pluralists in the sense that they respect the moral frameworks of others, and to assist those others in their chosen type of deliberation.

These skills are identifiable, teachable, should lay the foundation for what ought to become a new, independent profession.

I am willing to present this as a standard paper.

If you have or will publish on this topic, please cite reference:

I plan to publish this in the future, likely in the journal of clinical ethics, and possibly in some other clinical ethics journal.

Are you planning to or will you be willing to submit a poster along with your major paper?

Yes     No