Ethical Issues in Health Care
Ethics

- The study of what is right and wrong

- The study of what one “ought” or should do
Ethical Dilemma

- having to choose between 2 undesirable choices
- may have to learn to live with some ambiguity and uncertainty if ethical issues involved, but not to level of indifference
Principles of Ethics

- **Autonomy (self-determination)**
  - Freedom of choice, and
  - Accountable for the choice

- **Paternalism**
  - authority is assumed
  - authority is directed downward
Principles of Ethics

- **Beneficence**
  - if you cannot do good, then do no harm
  - actions can be taken to help prevent or remove harms or to simply improve

- **Non-maleficence**
  - Expectation to “do no harm.”
Principles of Ethics

- **Utility**
  - like utilitarianism above
  - greater good for the most

- **Justice**
  - equals are treated equal /fair
  - un-equals are treated as per their difference
Principles of Ethics

- Truth telling or veracity
  - Truth telling vs deception or white lies

- Fidelity
  - Keep promises

- Confidentiality
  - Legal and ethical
Setting Ethical Priorities

- Life threatening
- **Safety** (Maslow’s)
- Patient’s priority
- Nurse’s priority
Mr. T, who has been labeled a non-compliant. He is in and out of the hospital frequently and always has some type of pain requiring injectable medications.

There is an order to give torodol 5mg IM. Mr. T asks “what is the medication and how strong is it?”
What principle guides response?

- **Autonomy**
  - self-determination

- **Paternalism**
  - MD knows best

- **Beneficence**
  - to do good

- **Non-malefience**
  - to do not harm

- **Utility**
  - greater good

- **Justice**
  - equal treatment

- **Veracity**
  - truth telling

- **Fidelity**
  - promise keeping

- **Confidentiality**
  - legal
A patient is brought to the hospital in an extremely critical state. The family has supporting documentation that the patient wanted a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order if this ever happened.

The physician delays writing the order and the patient is sent to your nursing unit. Then the patient arrests!
What principle guides response?

- Autonomy: self-determination
- Paternalism: MD knows best
- Beneficence: to do good
- Non-malefience: to do not harm
- Utility: greater good
- Justice: equal treatment
- Veracity: truth telling
- Fidelity: promise keeping
- Confidentiality: legal
A 85-year female, otherwise active, is scheduled for a right mastectomy in 2 weeks.

Her granddaughter asks you, is it ethical for this procedure be done?
Current ethical issues and dilemmas

- Healthcare for illegals
- Medi-Cal for non-citizen
- HMO denial of service
- “dumping”
- Pain mgmt
- Genetic programming
- Genome therapy
- Poor work ethic
- Impaired nurse
- Euthanasia
- Nurse shortage
- Decreased funding for health care
- Technology
- Abortion
- Stem cell research
- Restraints
- Cloning
- Organ harvesting