

“Ethical Issues In The CS Arena”

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Objectives:

At the end of the article, staff will be able to:

- ? Define ethics
- ? Discuss development of professional and personal ethics
- ? Know what ethical issues may arise in a health care facility

Ethics is defined as the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation. *Ethical actions* are those that conform to accepted and professional standards of conduct. Our conduct is complicated by our individual beliefs, knowledge, work ethic and other ethic and religious practices.

Morals, on the other hand, relate to the principles of right and wrong in behavior; a set of moral principles or values. When our professional conduct fails to conform to moral standards or policies, our behavior is said to be unethical. In addition to individual morals and ethics, professional ethics are those principals of conduct governing an individual or group.

Today ethical issues are more complex due to personal accountability and obligation to the public, both requirements in healthcare. As modern medicine continues to find new and more complex treatment methodologies, some of which are controversial, new ethical issues will need to be addressed and old ethical issues may have to be revisited.

As professionals, we have a moral obligation regarding our public and private decision-making and behaviors. In today’s health care environment, what we do and how we do it affects the

lives of everyone. No individual or group of individuals is untouched. We need to re-affirm our moral obligation to do the right thing in the health care profession, which can sometimes be ambiguous, difficult and conflicted! Many health care organizations have developed a Code of Ethics such as the American College of Healthcare Executives, Dental Hygiene Practice and Nursing.

In the Central Sterile Processing department, ethical issues are addressed on a daily basis. The manner in which the CS professional handles these issues can have long-range effects on the department, the employees, the facility itself, the patients and any other customers involved within the organization.

Ethical dilemmas can be defined as having to choose between two equally desirable or undesirable alternatives. It is important to remember that the way professionals approach and solve ethical dilemmas is influenced by their values and basic beliefs about the rights, duties and goals of all human beings. As a professional of the Central Sterile arena, there are many ethical issues that you will face on a daily basis. This could be anything from, is this item sterile or not to whom do you owe your primary allegiance; the organization or your subordinates? The way the CS professional handles these issues can have long range effects on the department, the employees and the health care facility as well as the patient/customer.

If you are the manager of a Central Sterile Department, for instance, you have additional obligations that a CS Tech may not have. Some of these include:

1. Provide a safe work environment.
2. Not discriminate.
3. Be supportive of staff.
4. Safeguard customers from unethical or illegal practice.
5. Support the policies of the facility.
6. Maintain conditions of employment.

7. Work with other health care professionals.
8. Act in accord with one's own values.
9. Promote efforts to meet the health needs of the customer.
10. Assure privacy and confidentiality of all staff.

ETHICAL ISSUE

Entitlement

Sometimes employees feel they are "entitled" to certain benefits such as using sick time when they're not sick because they're "entitled to it." There is also the issue of taking supplies and other items home with them because they worked hard today and no one ever gives them anything and I need some dressings for my dog anyway so I'll take these.

Work

Within the many CS departments experiencing ethnic diversity, there is the potential for diversity in work ethic. All employees need to understand both the department's and the facility's expectations in terms of commitment to quality and work performance. It is always up to the manager of the department to make perfectly clear what the standard is and what are the consequences of poor work performance or less than optimal quality of work.

Sales Representatives

Most facilities today have a corporate compliance or similar policy. These policies detail the need to keep separate ones' position as a representative of the health care facility and personal gain. These policies specify that health care personnel should not accept nor expect favors, gifts or any remuneration from sales representatives, including invitations to lunch or dinner. Such activities can be misconstrued as kickbacks. It is important for CSP professionals to be familiar with their facility's corporate compliance policies and comply with them at all times. In addition, if the CSP professional has knowledge of anyone in the health care facility abusing the corporate compliance policies, this information should be reported to your Corporate Compliance Officer or Administrator

for follow-up. Usually these issues are investigated anonymously.

Employees

Sometimes the CSP manager is confronted with employees taking products home without paying for them. Occasionally there is the falsification of time and attendance, and/or falsification of permanent records such as the sterilization record. There can also be a failure to report a positive biological test result. All tasks in CS are important and complete documentation is required to verify that items were prepared properly. There can be no exceptions.

Patient Safety

Patient safety can never be compromised. Sometimes the CS professional may be privy to information that may have a negative impact on patient safety (such as a device processed by a sterilization method other than that recommended by the manufacturer.) Anytime there is an indication that patient safety could be compromised, the CSP professional has an ethical responsibility to report this information to the appropriate administrative or risk management personnel. Policies and procedures should be developed, shared with staff via in-service training and enforced regarding the careful inspection and testing of all patient care equipment handled by the CSP staff.

Employee Safety

The CS manager has a legal and ethical responsibility to safeguard the workplace for employees. If there is an employee safety issue, it must be reported to the appropriate administrative representative. Employee safety can present under a number of scenarios; malfunctioning equipment, insufficient equipment to get the job done or outdated equipment.

In an era of markedly limited physical, human and fiscal resources, nearly all decision making by CS professionals involves some ethical component. In addition, there is the potential for staff to experience interpersonal conflict resulting from personal, subordinate, organizational and consumer responsibilities. There are no rules or guidelines in existence that will cover all aspects of the ethical dilemmas that managers face oftentimes on a daily basis.

