

Chapter 8

Collaboration and Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Interprofessional collaboration includes relationships and decision making among health professionals, patients, families, and communities. Because its aim of high-quality care is consistent with acting in the best interest of patients, interprofessional collaboration is inherently ethical. Ethical knowledge is an important guidepost for interprofessional education, behaviors, and decision making. Interprofessional collaboration, however, also requires awareness of the impact of culture, context, emotion, disciplinary values and beliefs, and legal-centric views on the provision of ethical interprofessional, patient-centred care and on interprofessional relationships. This chapter discusses integration of ethics within interprofessional collaboration and decision making. Consideration is given to ethical theoretical frameworks and concepts and their application within interprofessional relationships and collaboration, as well as to the global predominance of traditional Western bioethics and informed consent and their limitations in selected cultural contexts.

INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION: ETHICAL KNOWING AND WORKING TOGETHER

Movement towards interprofessional care has been encouraged and promoted globally, nationally, and locally by health care experts and advocates as well as by organizations and regulatory bodies for health care disciplines. At a global level, the World Health Organization's (2018) *Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education* urges policy makers, organizations, community health leaders, and health care professionals (HCPs) to adopt the practice of interprofessional and collaborative health care. The practice of professionals working together collaboratively is en-

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couraged as a strategy to address global shortages in health care workers by creating flexible teams with efficient and effective use of collective and diverse expertise.

Interprofessional practice is also encouraged as capable of producing high quality health outcomes and health care systems, despite funding issues and health care crises such as pandemics, natural disasters, and demographic shifts towards an aging population (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). The effectiveness of interprofessional practice is related to professionals working together in teams and to its focus on collaboration and on optimal employment of unique and common skill sets and knowledge backgrounds of different health professionals in provision of quality health care, rather than on respective roles (Engel & Prentice, 2013). Rising complexities in health care delivery and aging populations suggest the collaborative combining and working together of various professional minds and skill sets is both relevant and timely.

Interprofessional collaboration and teamwork is inherently ethical because of its focus on results that ultimately promote the best interests of patients (Engel & Prentice, 2013), a perspective highlighted in a 2015 report by the Institute of Medicine [IOM]. The report also indicated that interprofessional education was instrumental to interprofessional collaboration and teamwork and by implication, to decreases in medical errors, increased patient safety, and lower costs in health care. This optimism was reflected in the work of an expert panel, initially composed of representatives from national organizations in the United States involved in the education of health care professionals including nurses, dentists, pharmacists, osteopaths, and public health practitioners. The panel identified core competencies for interprofessional education (Interprofessional Education Collaborative [IPEC], 2023) and incorporated competencies identified by IOM and ideas from WHO's framework on collaborative practice and interprofessional education (IPEC, 2023). Underlying this work was an assumption that a collaboration ready workforce begins with students in the various health professions who are exposed early to values and skills essential to interprofessional collaboration and teamwork (IPEC, 2023). Importantly, the IPEC panel specifically delineated the importance of ethics by including ethics and values as a core competency (IPEC, 2023). This competency emphasized values commonly associated with ethical behavior such as respect and compassion for others and maintenance of dignity, both within patient and caregiver relationships and within team relationships. Further, the need for ethical conduct and shared values among team members was outlined, which includes valuing the expertise of other health care professionals (IPEC, 2023), a perspective that reflects Kantian and ethical thought on the worth of persons (Oberle & Raffin Bouchal, 2009).

The IPEC documents are accepted widely in the United States and globally as a basis for regulatory and practice guidelines and program accreditation (IPEC, 2023). Recent revisions have incorporated ethical concepts such as social justice and health

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