

# Differentiate Between Personal, Professional, and Organizational Ethics

**E**THICS are the moral principles by which an individual lives. They provide a code of conduct, telling people what they should or should not do. Medical professionals must abide by several different sets of ethics, balancing their personal beliefs with their job duties. In this unit, you will learn more about the different types of ethics and how the three types compare.



## Objective:



Compare personal, professional, and organizational ethics.

## Key Terms:



organizational ethics  
personal ethics  
professional ethics

## Understanding Ethics

Ethics can be influenced by family members, friends, cultures, organizations, and/or rules. Three types of ethics are personal, professional, and organizational ethics.

## PERSONAL ETHICS

**Personal ethics** are an individual's own beliefs about what is right or wrong. The beliefs guide a person's behavior. For example, a person may refrain from immoral or illegal practices

because it is his or her personal belief that such practices are wrong. Ethics are often shaped by an individual's upbringing and vary from person to person.

In the health care field, personal ethics may lead a person to display loyalty to patients, co-workers, and employers. It may also result in an employee respecting the roles of team members. The person may be sincere, honest, and caring—treating others the way he or she wants to be treated. Personal ethics may cause a health care provider to value a patient's independence and determination.

Personal ethics may lead a person to step in when he or she sees something that conflicts with his or her beliefs. For instance, if an individual observes others engaging in illegal actions, he or she may contact the proper authorities.

## PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

**Professional ethics** are the profession's own code of ethics. The Hippocratic Oath, developed by Hippocrates, was the first set of ethical standards for doctors. The first professional code of ethics was established in 1846 by the American Medical Association. When individuals enter a health care occupation, they learn about the code of ethics for that particular job.

Health care workers should make every effort to abide by the code to become competent and ethical employees. Breaking the professional code of ethics may result in the employee being suspended or losing his or her license.

The basic principles for the health care field's code of ethics are to put the saving of lives and the promotion of health above all else. Caregivers should make every effort to keep the patient as comfortable as possible and to preserve life whenever possible.

Professionals should respect the patient's choice to die peacefully and with dignity when all options have been discussed with the patient and/or the family.

Professional ethics require health care workers to treat all patients equally. Bias, prejudice, and discrimination have no place in health care. Caregivers should provide for all individuals to the best of their ability.

Health care providers are ethically required to maintain a competent level of skill for their occupation. They also must stay informed on advances in their field and pursue continuing education as necessary.



**FIGURE 1.** Professional ethics require health care workers to treat all patients equally. Bias, prejudice, and discrimination have no place in health care.



## FURTHER EXPLORATION...

### ONLINE CONNECTION: Medical Ethics

Professional ethics require doctors to save a life whenever possible, but what if the patient wants to stop treatment? Does a doctor have the right to treat a patient against his or her will if the treatment will prolong the patient's life?

Visit the following Web site to watch a video on medical ethics:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGLcYVQeUAE>

## ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS

**Organizational ethics** are the unique code of ethics that each health care organization has for its employees to follow. The basic principles of organizational ethics relate to professional codes and job descriptions. They may include virtues (e.g., honesty, integrity, fairness, and trustworthiness). The code may include the organization's mission statements, policies, and procedures. Organizational ethics often reflect the culture and community served by the organization.

### Summary:



Personal ethics are an individual's own beliefs and values, which guide his or her behavior. They are often shaped by an individual's upbringing and vary from person to person. Professional ethics are codes of conduct for a specific occupation. Breaking the professional code of ethics may result in the employee being suspended or losing his or her license. Organizational ethics are the unique code of ethics that each health care organization sets for its employees. It may include policies and mission statements for the organization as well as the set of virtues it requires of its employees.

### Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are personal ethics?
2. What are some basic principles of personal ethics?
3. What are professional ethics?
4. What are some basic principles of professional ethics?
5. What are the consequences of violating professional ethics?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Think of three hypothetical situations that present ethical dilemmas for health care workers. Present the examples to a health care worker, and ask what he or she would do in each situation. Ask when personal ethics overrule professional ethics or vice versa. What would you do in each of the examples you presented?

## Web Links:

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### Developing Personal Ethics

[http://personalethics.suite101.com/article.cfm/developing\\_personal\\_ethics](http://personalethics.suite101.com/article.cfm/developing_personal_ethics)

### Ethics Resources

<http://www.ethicsweb.ca/resources/bioethics/>