

Healing the Body Enriching the Mind Nurturing the Soul



Ethics

at Covenant Health

Our choices have a ripple effect in our life and those around us. Wherever we find ourselves within the Covenant Health community, we each have choices to make. By reflecting upon the legacy of our founders, our shared mission, vision, values and ethical framework, we are not alone as we seek to make good ethical choices. A history of approximately 150 years of ethical reflection and experience has shaped, matured and deepened our commitment at Covenant Health to serve with compassion for each other as well as the people and communities we serve.



Ethics at Covenant Health



Since the beginning of Alberta’s first Catholic health organization—Youville Home in 1863—ethical reflection has been a cornerstone of who we are and what we do. Grounded in the traditions of our founding Sisters and the evolving ethical reflection of the Catholic Church, Covenant Health seeks to bring the best of our wisdom and lived experience to ethical issues. Ethics touches everyone from the bedside to the boardroom—whether the issue is determining the best form of response to a medical emergency, how to allocate scarce resources in a just manner or maintaining personal and corporate integrity in the face of adversity.

Ethics permeates Covenant Health—from clinical ethics that focuses upon the relationship between the caregiver and those they care for, to organizational ethics that challenges us to make departmental and organizational decisions congruent with our mission and core values. Each day we make important personal, clinical and organizational decisions. For Covenant Health, *ethics is a way of life that examines who we ought to be and what we ought to do in light of who we say we are.*

Ethics is central to our identity as a health organization. This guide provides an overview of our mission, vision and values and the framework and principles that shape our ethical reflection.

Who we say we are

The meaning of covenant

A covenant is a special relationship between parties. It is more than a contract or one-sided arrangement, but rather a relationship built on mutuality, binding agreement, and enduring promise. In its deepest meaning, a covenant is about fidelity, deemed both irrevocable and permanent.

As a Catholic organization, Covenant Health affirms the foundational belief of our faith that God is with us always—and no more so than in times of illness and suffering. We are stewards of this saving God's love, collaborators in the healing ministry of Jesus.

Our Mission

We are called to continue the healing ministry of Jesus by serving with compassion, upholding the sacredness of life in all stages, and caring for the whole person—body, mind and soul.

Our Vision

Covenant Health will positively influence the health of Albertans and be of greater service to those in need by working together with compassion, quality and innovation.

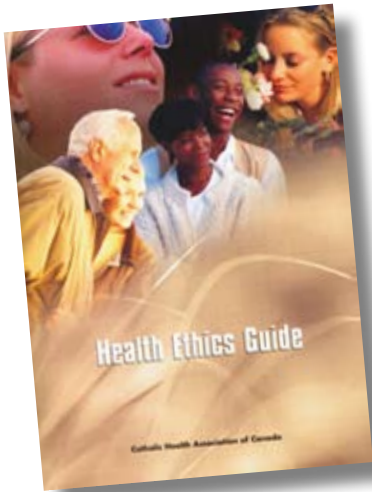
Our Values

As a Catholic organization, we are committed to serving people of all faiths, cultures and circumstances, according to our values:

Compassion, Respect, Collaboration, Social Justice, Integrity, Stewardship



Catholic Health Ethics Guide



As a Catholic health care organization, Covenant Health does its ethical reflection within the context of our mission, vision, values and the *Health Ethics Guide* approved by the Catholic Bishops of Canada.

The purpose of the guide is to “facilitate sound ethical reflection that leads to informed decision-making. It presents a moral vision reflecting Roman Catholic teaching on health ethics as it applies to contemporary Canadian society.” (viii)

The guide is broken into the following chapters

1. The Communal Nature of Care
2. Dignity of the Human Person
3. Human Reproduction
4. Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation
5. Care of the Dying Person
6. Research on Human Subjects
7. Governance and Administration

The appendices include

1. A Framework for Ethical Discernment
2. Principle of Legitimate Cooperation
3. Glossary of Terms
4. Selected Bibliography



Copies of the *Health Ethics Guide* are available on all medical units, in departmental offices and Covenant Health libraries.

Who we ought to be

Christian ethical reasoning is based upon a worldview contained in the gospel as interpreted by the church.

This world view gives rise to values and principles that direct ethical decision making and that enable us to respond to the call to respect dignity, promote justice and foster trust.

Health Ethics Guide

Ethical reflection at Covenant Health happens within the context of key principles and values as outlined in the *Health Ethics Guide* as well as our shared mission, vision and values.

Fundamental Values to Ethical Reflection

Dignity of the Human Person

Interconnectedness of every human person

Related Values that Provide a Lenses for Decision-Making

Stewardship and care for creation, each other and the common good

Respect for Life from conception until natural death

Common Good of all people by creating a just and compassionate society

Charity and solidarity responds to the needs of all people with a special emphasis upon the voiceless, poor and marginalized

Creativity



What we ought to do

Ethics is the discipline that examines who we ought to be and what we ought to do in light of who we say we are.

Organizational Ethics is the intentional use of values to guide the decisions of a system (Ralph I. Porter).

Clinical Ethics focuses on the encounter between patients/residents and health care providers.

Research Ethics examines the fundamental rationale for a study; considers whether the study question under investigation is important; explores whether the study design can answer the question; looks to protect the rights and interests of the human research subjects.

The mission, vision and values of Covenant Health provide a picture of 'what we ought to do' as well as our commitment to each other and the people we serve. Ultimately, what matters is how we *live out* these words in action.

Framework for Ethical Decision Making

An ethical dilemma arises when there is tension between loyalties, responsibilities, duties, rights or values, all of which are good in themselves, but not all of which can be satisfied in a particular situation. In our personal, professional and organizational life, we often struggle with issues for which no 'right' answer seems available. In these situations, it is important to think through as carefully as possible the many factors that are at stake.

Although we often 'do ethics' automatically, a decision-making framework helps to deepen ethical reflection and awareness in the midst of serious moral or ethical conflict. A structured or disciplined approach to reflection does not constitute a recipe for arriving at 'the right answer.' However, like a road map, it helps to know where we are and provides a sense of what we need to consider as we seek to move ahead.

What we ought to do



Process for Decision-Making

1. Define the issue(s)
Defining the issue or problem begins the very important process of reaching consensus regarding what the issue actually is.
2. Acknowledge feelings
 - What are the 'gut' reactions?
 - What biases, loyalties and intuitions are present?
3. Clarify the facts as much as possible
 - Establish the facts of the issue (who, what, where, when, why, how)
 - Establish what we do not know
 - Describe the relevant factors (social, economic, political, legal)
4. Identify stakeholders and the various perspectives
 - Clarify perspectives:
 - How do you see this issue(s)
 - Name the perspectives of the various participants
5. Analyze the values
 - What values are at stake?
 - Determine value conflicts:
 - What values are being affirmed?
 - What values are being negated?
6. Identify alternative courses of action in light of our mission, vision and values
 - What are the options?
 - What are the pros and cons of each option, including doing nothing?
7. Make a decision
 - What option best advances the vision, mission, values and strategic directions of Covenant Health?
 - Are there any contingency plans in case the decision does not have the intended outcomes or deals with possible conflicts?



8. Implement the decision
 - Who will implement the decision?
 - How and when will the decision be communicated to all stakeholders?
 - What process and criteria for measuring will be used to evaluate the decision and outcome?
9. Revisit and examine the decision-making process
 - What happened?
 - What went well?
 - What did we learn? What learning can we take forward into the next situation?

The following moral principles provide an additional reference

1. **Totally & Integrity**
No human function can ever be sacrificed except for the saving or better functioning of the whole person. Basic human capacities may not be sacrificed if more harm than good would result to the person.
2. **Double Effect**
Action has two consequences: beneficial & harmful.
3. **Subsidiarity**
Decisions taken closest to grassroots.
4. **Free & Informed Decision Making**
The person receiving care is the primary decision maker; advanced health care directives must be respected.
5. **Confidentiality**
 - a) Privacy of personal information
 - b) Freedom from unnecessary intrusion of others
6. **Legitimate Co-Operation**
To understand this unique Catholic Principle, please read pages 88-92 in the *Health Ethics Guide*.

A brief glossary of terms

from the *Health Ethics Guide*



Abortion

A *direct* abortion is a procedure whose deliberate purpose is to terminate the life of an embryo or a fetus. An *indirect* abortion is a procedure necessary to save the life of the mother in which the death of the fetus is an inevitable result, e.g. the treatment of an ectopic pregnancy.

Allocation

The designation or the setting aside of resources for specific purposes (see *Rationing*).

Common Good

The sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1906*).

Competence

Possessing sufficient capacity to make a reasonable decision for one's own best interest.

Conscience

The specifically human capacity to make practical judgements in matters involving ethical issues.

Consent (informed)

Informed consent requires that an individual possess the competence and freedom. They must understand and appreciate the information needed to make a reasonable decision in their own best interest.

Distributive Justice

The obligation of society to distribute the goods of that society equitably to its individual members.

Duress

In the context of the principle of legitimate cooperation, duress refers to those pressures which cause the co-operator to lose the freedom to refuse to co-operate lest a greater evil occur.

Moral Certainty

The confidence that all of the conditions required for making an informed decision have been met beyond a reasonable doubt.

Principle

A more specific articulation of a value that is used as a starting point or rule of thumb for good ethical reflection and action.

Religion

The expression of spirituality through traditions, rites and practices usually within the context of an organized faith.

Spirituality

The search for the sacred. A conscious striving to move beyond isolation and self-absorption to a deeper awareness of interconnectedness with the self, other human beings and the transcendent.



Ethics Services

Clinical ethics consultations are available across all sites to support staff, patients, residents or families in times of ethical uncertainty and conflict. This service helps to ensure that the most appropriate care is delivered in a manner that is respectful of all parties involved. In addition, the service can help staff, patients, residents or families reflect on and understand the ethical dimensions of decisions already made. Consults can also be requested to facilitate an organizational issue within a unit, department or site.

To request an ethics consult, contact your site switchboard and ask for the Ethics Service contact at your site.



Covenant Health

*Compassionate care led
by Catholic values*

www.CovenantHealth.ca