Respecting Patient/Resident Choices

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Let’s begin with a story…

Sara, a 47 year old woman, is a resident in a continuing care facility. She has MS and mental health issues. Due to her disability, Sara needs help with daily activities—dressing, hygiene, mobility, transferring. Sara expresses her strong desire to move back to her apartment (“I don’t want to die in this place!”). Some staff feel concerned that Sara will not cope alone at home. Others question her mental stability.
Guiding Ethical Principles

• Respect for Autonomy
• Beneficence
• Nonmaleficence
• Justice
Autonomy

The dictionary definition:

Autonomy is self-governance, the ability or right to determine one’s own actions or beliefs.

What other words come to mind when we think

»Autonomy?
Autonomy

Independence

Freedom

Self rule, self determination

Individual expression

No constraints
Beneficence

The dictionary definition: action done to benefit another

What other words come to mind when we think of Beneficence?
Beneficence

Good
Mercy
Kindness
Charity
Do good

• Our professional codes
• Covenant Health “Our Commitment to Ethical Integrity” Code of Conduct
• Our professional roles
• Our identities
The Clash

What do we do when “Respect for Autonomy” and “Beneficence” clash?

Can you think of situations where you feel this tension?

What barriers to respecting autonomy exist in your work?

Are there any barriers to beneficence?
More about Sara…

Sara has no family to speak of. She grew up in 12 different foster homes. At 16 years of age, Sara travelled to Vancouver where she was involved in a “high risk lifestyle”. Though she has five children, all were taken into the child welfare system and Sara has not seen them in years. Until two years ago, Sara lived by herself in a small apartment. She has a group of friends who continue to visit her in the continuing care centre.
Living at Risk

In what ways do patients or residents live at risk?

Are there acceptable and unacceptable choices or risks?

Who decides?

Are you uncomfortable? Why?
Four ideas that help (me)

- Sick role (and negotiation)
- Newer versions of Autonomy
- Moral courage
- Compassion
1. Sick Role Theory

Four features:

1. Recovery is not possible on your own (by will)
2. Your illness gives you a pass from normal responsibilities (your job, family care)
3. You need to do everything to get better
4. You must seek professional help

Talcott Parsons 1951
Negotiation strategies in LTC

1. Attempt to disguise problem
2. Minimize problem (if cannot disguise)
3. Deny problem needs treatment or that move to nursing unit is appropriate
4. Seek alternatives to nursing unit
5. Create conflict among staff

David L. Morgan 1984
2. Autonomy revisited…

Recognize autonomy in light of:

- Interdependence
- Context
- Skills
3. Moral Courage

To overcome our fear and act to address our ethical concern in a way that expresses what we see happening (or what has happened) and to ask what could have been done differently to prevent future issues.

To initiate the dialogue and reflection with others.
4. Compassion

• One of our Catholic values

• To see the other person, that person’s life and circumstance, how he/she came to this place in life, gives rise to compassion

• Opens up the possibility of journeying with the person, to share the load, or to bear the load for awhile

• What does compassion mean to you?
A final note on Sara…

Sara is becoming belligerent with staff members. She uses name-calling and foul language during care procedures. On several recent occasions, Sara was found intoxicated in her room. It is unknown where the alcohol came from. Sara refuses to name the source, adding, “I don’t have to put up with this bull. For as long as I live here, I have a right to live any way I want.”
What we ought to do…

Walk through the Process for Decision-Making

• Define the issue
• Acknowledge feelings
• Clarify facts as much as possible
• Identify stakeholders and various perspectives
• Analyze values

• Identify alternative courses of action in light of our mission, vision, and values

• Make a decision

• Implement the decision

• Revisit and examine the decision-making process
Thank you for your insights and participation!

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