Introduction to Practical Ethics for Public Health

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The National Collaborating Centres for Public Health

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National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP)

Our mandate

- Support public health actors in their efforts to promote healthy public policies

Our areas of expertise

- The effects of public policies on health
- Generating and using knowledge about policies
- Intersectoral actors and mechanisms
- Strategies to influence policy making
Just checking in....

How familiar are you with public health ethics?

- Not much
- Somewhat familiar
- Expert
What we would like to discuss this morning

• What is public health (PH) ethics?

• Does PH ethics matter?

• How does it work? How can we get started?
‘Typical’ case

10 infected patients (5 adults, 5 children)
2 infected adults are care workers (volunteers)
10 doses of antiviral available
Adults need 2 doses, children 1 dose

What do you do?

– 1 dose to everyone? (strict egalitarianism)
– 1 dose to each child, 2 doses to 2 adults? (utilitarianism)
– Lottery? (fair opportunity)
– Most disadvantaged first? (social justice)
– Care workers first? (social utility)

Case adapted from McDougall & Gauvin, 2010.
What is public health ethics?

Normative ethics

Bioethics

Medical ethics

+ environmental ethics, animal ethics, etc.

Public health ethics

Adapted from Dawson, 2010a.
Other public health cases

- Water fluoridation
- Smoking ban
- Traffic-calming policy
- Affordable housing
- Menu labelling
- Soda tax
- HPV vaccination
- ...
Mapping public health ethics (1)

Moral theories:
- to provide moral guidance and justification for any situation

Frameworks:
- “to aid deliberation by making relevant values explicit.”
  (Dawson, 2010b, p. 196.)

Principles:
- Values guiding action

Codes of ethics:
- professionalism

Public Health Ethics

Dawson, 2010b.
Mapping public health ethics (2)

Ethics of PH:
- professional ethics
- codes of ethics

Ethics in PH:
- applied ethics

Ethics for PH:
- Advocacy ethics
- for the value of healthy communities

Critical PH ethics:
- Questions the givens
- How it is framed
- Underlying power relations

Ethics in PH vs. critical PH ethics

What should you do?

- 1 dose to everyone?
- 1 dose to each child, 2 doses to 2 adults?
- Lottery?
- Most disadvantaged first?
- Care workers first?

10 infected patients (5 adults, 5 children)
2 infected adults are care workers (volunteers)
10 doses of antiviral available
Adults need 2 doses, children 1 dose

Ethics in PH

Critical PH ethics

• Why do I have only 10 doses of an experimental antiviral after 38 years of Ebola?
• What social structures produced this situation?
• Would this situation be treated differently if it were in North America?
Mapping public health ethics (3)

Research ethics:
- Research ethics board

Public Health Ethics

Practical ethics:
- Applied ethics
What is public health ethics?

PH ethics is mostly about what **should** and **shouldn’t** be done

- **collectively**
- to protect and promote the health of **communities**.

Next... Why PH ethics?
Why PH ethics?

10 infected patients (5 adults, 5 children)
2 infected adults are care workers (volunteers)
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What do you do?
- 1 dose to everyone?
- 1 dose to each child, 2 doses to 2 adults?
- Lottery?
- Most disadvantaged first?
- Care workers first?

Does it matter?
If yes, then PH ethics matters.
Why PH ethics?

PH practice is sufficiently different from clinical practice to require its own ethics...

...in order to help:

– See ethical issues
– Deliberate about options
– Make decisions
– Justify them
Questions, comments...?
How does it work?

Case study: Neighbourhood-wide traffic-calming

After public consultations and recommendations from public health, the city of Wideroads has decided to implement a neighbourhood-wide traffic-calming scheme to slow motorized traffic on residential streets and redirect through traffic to arterial roads. There is significant opposition from outside of the neighbourhood, especially from drivers who are afraid their daily commute will take longer. A few neighbourhood residents are against the project, with opposition coming mostly from those living along arterial roads.

‘Curb extensions at crosswalk’ Photo credit: Richard Drdul. Flickr.com Creative commons licence: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/
What can ethical theories tell us?

- Consequentialism (Utilitarianism)
- Deontology
- Rights-based theories
- Virtue ethics
- Casuistry

'Mole Hill Vancouver 9-5-04(113)' Photo credit: Dan Burden. Used with permission.
Utilitarianism

Do that which produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people

• It is consequentialist – i.e., more focused on outcomes (ends), less focused on the means by which they are achieved

• Good equals maximizing happiness / utility / health (e.g., DALYs/QALYs)

“Traffic calming measures [... are] crucial to decreasing the entirely preventable toll of road injuries. [...] With an overburdened healthcare system and the high economic and human toll of road injuries, we should take advantage of tested measures for safer streets.”

Source: Schwandt, 2015.
Utilitarianism applied to our traffic-calming case...

+ ▪ Less collision-related injuries
  ▪ More walking and cycling with associated health benefits
  ▪ Etc.

- ▪ Small increase in travel time for commuters
  ▪ More noise for the residents of arterials
  ▪ Etc.
Deontology

Never treat people “simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” - Kant

• Deontological approaches focus more on the means than the ends.... deon = ‘duty’
• Despite various roots and theories, a family of approaches based on following rules, duties, respecting rights and other persons.

“Some of those [who gave people ‘what we know they need’ ] [...] were decent people trying to do good. But I prefer people who want to just leave me alone and not social engineer my life in the direction they think I need.”

Deontology applied to our traffic-calming case...

– Shouldn’t the minority living along arterial roads have more of a say on what will happen to their local environment?

– Shouldn’t the right to live in a safe environment trump the pleasure of/the time lost by commuters?
One problem with ethical theories...

• ...is that it is difficult to cover every case and every intuition we have with one unified theory.

• The result is that there are many theories to choose from, each with its strengths and weaknesses which are revealed by specific cases.

• And their strengths cannot be combined in ONE coherent theory (2,500 years and counting...).
Principle-based approaches

They provide a selection of values and principles, and a means of putting them into application

• A well-known example: Beauchamp and Childress’ four principles, a.k.a. ‘principlism.’
  – autonomy
  – beneficence
  – non-maleficence
  – justice

• In public health: frameworks

Beauchamp & Childress, 1994.
Frameworks for public health ethics: some positive features

- A lens for looking, and therefore seeing ethical issues
- No PhD required to operate a framework
- Flexible: admits introduction of other relevant values
- Common language
- An entry point: reduces potential paralysis
- Structure for deliberation
- Combining theory and practice
- Ethical issues/tensions among principles are dealt with in deliberation and not in theory
- ‘Frame’
- Draw in principles and values that suit the context

Frameworks are not...

One size fits all....

Formulæ, algorithms, flowcharts


‘indecision dice’ Photo credit: Anne-Lise Heinrichs. Flickr.com
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Several frameworks in PHE

• **Principle-based:**
  – Provide a series of principles for consideration,
  – Ideally they provide guidance about how to contextualize them for application in different situations, and how to balance them when they conflict.

• **Question-based:**
  – These pose a series of questions with issues to consider attached to each question,
  – There are principles/values underlying and elicited by the questions.

• As they have evolved, frameworks have tended to provide more and clearer guidance about how they are to be applied.
We’ll use two frameworks today

A) *Ethics and the Practice of Public Health.*

B) *Looking Ahead: Addressing Ethical Challenges in Public Health Practice.*

- We have adapted and summarized these frameworks. The versions included in your handouts represent the general structure of the original frameworks, highlight the key principles identified by the authors and include questions to help guide your discussions.

- There are many other frameworks out there for PHE; we have provided links to several at the end of this PPT.
Applying an ethics framework to a case

Case - “RadonSmart 2020 Program”
Use the framework in your handout to guide discussion

1. After an ethical examination of the program, would you approve it? For what reasons?

2. Would the program have to be modified to make it ethically acceptable? Why?

3. What was most helpful in the framework you used?

4. Did the framework fail to highlight anything important?

30 minutes: deliberation and decision-making in small groups.
10-15 minutes: reporting and discussion among the larger group.

‘Radon’ http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ARadon.svg
Photo credit: SA 2.5 Licence: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5

Case – “RadonSmart 2020 Program”

Your public health unit has been asked to comment on and participate in implementing some aspects of the provincial RadonSmart 2020 program. Initiatives include an information campaign and easier access to test kits to increase the number of households testing for radon. The target is to have half the buildings in BC tested by 2020. Your health unit would be responsible for informing all residents in your region about the risks of radon and how to access kits. $28 million has been allocated over five years for information, administration and subsidies for test kits.

Some facts about radon...

- Risks to smokers are multiplied
- Landlords not required to test or to remedy buildings tested by occupants
- 96% of Cdn. homes have not been tested
- 3000 deaths per year, nationwide
- 6.9% of Cdn. homes have unsafe levels
- $1500-$3000 cost to repair

What is the program aiming to do: unpacking its logic¹...

1. To learn more about making logic models to show the assumed steps between an intervention and its ultimate health effects, see Morestin & Castonguay, (2013), *Constructing a logic model for a healthy public policy: Why and how?*
Now what?

• We have only taken a brief look, but see that:
  – There are many theories, approaches, frameworks and principles in ethics, and more specifically in PH ethics.
  – They offer different perspectives for looking at cases.
  – They can have distinct, sometimes contradictory or conflicting, ethical implications.
Now what?

- We have only taken a brief look, but see that:
  - There are many theories, approaches, frameworks and principles in ethics, and more specifically in PH ethics.
  - They offer different perspectives for looking at cases.
  - They can have distinct, sometimes contradictory or conflicting, ethical implications.

- Despite this diversity:
  - They can help to clarify issues, to deliberate and to make better decisions.

- Next steps:
  - Take a look at the other frameworks listed at the end of our presentation and discuss them with your colleagues.
  - For more about how to interpret and evaluate frameworks, see: Introduction to Public Health Ethics 3 - Frameworks for Public Health Ethics [http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=1426](http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=1426)
  - Send us a note: perhaps we could help you to find or to develop resources that are suited to your particular workplace and interests in PH.
Questions and discussion

Resources
Here are a few principles that are commonly used in public health ethics frameworks:

**Substantive**
- Duty to provide care
- Effectiveness
- Equity / social justice
- Harm principle
- Least restrictive means
- Necessity
- Precautionary principle

**Procedural**
- Proportionality
- Protection of the public
- Reciprocity
- Respect
- Solidarity
- Sustainability
- Stewardship
- Accountability
- Inclusiveness
- Participation
- Reasonableness
- Responsibleness
- Responsiveness
- Transparency

**Substantive**: these can help to reveal ethical issues and to make and justify decisions in specific contexts.
**Procedural**: these can help in making ethical choices concerning the processes by which programs, policies etc. are realized.

For further information: Please send us an email and we can refer you to several interesting resources. Or, you can find these by consulting the frameworks that are listed on the next three slides.
Links to selected frameworks for public health ethics
(these are also a good source for learning about normative principles)


Selected frameworks (cont.)


Selected frameworks (cont.)


http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6939/7/12


References

# NCCHPP Publications in Ethics

## Recent publications:

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<td>Introduction to Public Health Ethics 1: Background</td>
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<td>An Introduction to the Ethical Implications of Economic Evaluations for Healthy Public Policy</td>
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<td>Methods of Economic Evaluation: What are the Ethical Implications for Healthy Public Policy?</td>
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## Just out this spring:

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## To come in 2015:

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<td>Solidarity in the Ethics and Practice of Public Health: Conceptions, Uses, and Implications</td>
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For a project update with our current plans and recent publications, please visit: [http://www.ncchpp.ca/126/News.ccnpps](http://www.ncchpp.ca/126/News.ccnpps)
Thanks for joining us

You’re interested in this topic? Visit us at www.ncchpp.ca for more resources

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