Ethics practice for public health practitioners

Workshop  | TOPHC  | March 27, 2015

Olivier Bellefleur & Michael Keeling
National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy
The National Collaborating Centres for Public Health

National Collaborating Centre for Infectious Diseases
Centre de collaboration nationale des maladies infectieuses
Winnipeg, MB | www.nccid.ca

National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health
Centre de collaboration nationale des déterminants de la santé
Antigonish, N.S. | www.nccdah.ca

National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health
Centre de collaboration nationale en santé environnementale
Vancouver, B.C. | www.ncceh.ca

National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools
Centre de collaboration nationale des méthodes et outils
Hamilton, ON | www.nccmt.ca

Centre de collaboration nationale sur les politiques publiques et la santé
National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy
Montréal-Québec, QC | www.ncchpp.ca
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

Public health ethics

+ environmental ethics, animal ethics, etc.

Adapted from Dawson, 2010a
Other public health cases

• Water fluoridation
• Smoking ban
• Traffic-calming policy
• Affordable housing
• Menu labelling
• Soda tax
• HPV vaccination
• ...

8
Medical ethics vs public health ethics

- **Focus on individuals**
  - Patient seeks out clinician
  - Cure
  - Clinical settings
  - Patient may reject advice
  - Should be in the best interest of patient

- **Focus on populations**
  - PH practitioner seeks out patients
  - Prevention
  - Community settings
  - Can be hard to opt out
  - May not be in the best interest of some individuals

**Normative ethics**

- **Bioethics**
  - Medical ethics
  - Public health ethics
  + environmental ethics, animal ethics, etc.
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

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?

• 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?

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...?
Case study: Water fluoridation

Based on community consultations and recommendations from public health, the municipality of Clearwater has decided to fluoridate all municipal water, effective immediately. There remains significant opposition in the community, amounting to about 15% of citizens, particularly from one school district.
What can ethical theories tell us?

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

‘Drip’ Photo credit: Anders Adermark. Flickr.com
Creative commons licence: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/
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)

“there is no harmful health risk from the fluoridation of community drinking water at current levels and that fluoridation continues to be an effective public health strategy to prevent dental disease”

Utilitarianism applied to our water fluoridation case...

+ 
- 

- Less cavities and tooth decay?
- Low-cost way to reach entire population?
- Etc.

- More cases of dental fluorosis?
- Less trust in public health interventions?
- 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, respect for others

“go buy all the fluoride tablets you want, and swallow all the fluoridated toothpaste you can buy, but leave the rest of us free to choose to not have it.”

Deontology applied to our water fluoridation case...

– Is it infringing on residents’ right to choose?

– Could it be designed with a way to opt-out?

‘Pipes’ Photo credit: Michael Pereckas. Image cropped. Flickr.com
Creative commons licence: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/
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

Frameworks for public health ethics: some positive features

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

Drawing from: Dawson, 2010b, pp. 192, 200
Frameworks are not...

Drawing from: Dawson, 2010b, p. 200

‘indecision dice’ Photo credit: Anne-Lise Heinrichs. Flickr.com
Creative commons licence: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/
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.
  - E.g. Upshur (2002); Childress et al., (2002).

- **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.
  - E.g., Kass (2001); Public Health Ontario (2012).

- 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) *An ethical framework for the prevention of overweight and obesity: a tool for thinking through a programme’s ethical aspects.*

B) *Putting public health ethics into practice: a systematic framework.*

- These are question-based, similar in structure and provide instructions about how to use them.
- 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 - “Let’s lose a million pounds!”
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.
Case – “Let’s lose a million pounds!”

Your public health unit has been asked to comment on and participate in implementing some of the propositions put forward to meet the city’s goal in the “Let’s lose a million pounds!” challenge. Among the proposed initiatives is a junk food ban for all public buildings (schools, hospitals, government offices, etc.). Only foods deemed healthy will be offered in cafeterias and vending machines, and workers in public buildings will be encouraged to only bring healthy foods to their workplaces. Those seen to be in contravention will be asked to walk a kilometre.

This case is inspired by various million pound-type weight-loss initiatives. For example, in Southern Wisconsin (http://www.princetonclub.net/mpc), Oklahoma City (https://www.thiscityisgoingonadiet.com/), Houston (http://www.shapeuphouston.org/about/millionpoundchallenge), San Jose – Silicon Valley (http://www.loseamillion.com/), Canada (http://www.public-value.cbc.radio-canada.ca/story/43/) etc.
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

### 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)


References

NCCHPP Publications in Ethics

**Recent publications:**

Introduction to Public Health Ethics 1: Background  
[http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=977](http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=977)

An Introduction to the Ethical Implications of Economic Evaluations for Healthy Public Policy  
[http://www.ncchpp.ca/144/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=962](http://www.ncchpp.ca/144/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=962)

Methods of Economic Evaluation: What are the Ethical Implications for Healthy Public Policy?  
[http://www.ncchpp.ca/144/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=1369](http://www.ncchpp.ca/144/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=1369)

The Principle of Reciprocity: How Can it Inform Public Health and Healthy Public Policies?  
[http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=1340](http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=1340)

**Just out this week:**

Introduction to Public Health Ethics 2: Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings  
[http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/publications.ccnpps?id_article=1424](http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/publications.ccnpps?id_article=1424)

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)

**To come in 2015:**

Solidarity in the Ethics and Practice of Public Health: Conceptions, Uses, and Implications

For a project update with our current plans and recent publications, please visit:  
Thanks for joining us

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

Michael Keeling & Olivier Bellefleur
National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy

michael.keeling@inspq.qc.ca  olivier.bellefleur@inspq.qc.ca