

Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet¹

1. Recognizing the problem or concern
2. Identifying possible alternatives
3. Determining what is professionally at stake
4. Determining what else is ethically at stake
5. Determining what ought to be done
6. Choosing a course of action

¹Modified with permission from Ozar D. and Sokol, D. *Dental Ethics at Chairside*. 2nd ed, Georgetown University Press, Washington DC 2002

Ethical Considerations in Patient Care: The “Four Box” Method

<p>❖ MEDICAL/DENTAL INDICATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Principles of Beneficence and Nonmaleficence</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the patient's medical/dental problem? history? diagnosis? prognosis? 2. Is the problem acute? chronic? critical? reversible? emergent? terminal? 3. What are the <i>goals of treatment</i>? 4. In what circumstances are treatments not indicated? 5. What are the probabilities of success of various treatment options? 6. What are the plans in case of therapeutic failure? <p style="text-align: center;"><i>In sum, how can this patient be benefited by medical/dental care, and how can harm be avoided?</i></p>	<p>❖ PATIENT PREFERENCES</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Principle of Respect for Autonomy</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has the patient been informed of benefits and risks, understood this information, and given consent? 2. Is the patient mentally capable and legally competent? Is there evidence of incapacity? 3. If mentally capable, what preferences about treatment is the patient stating? 4. If incapacitated, has the patient expressed prior preferences? 5. Who is the appropriate surrogate to make decisions for the incapacitated patient? 6. Is the surrogate using appropriate standards for decision making? 7. Is the patient unwilling or unable to cooperate with treatment? If so, why? <p style="text-align: center;"><i>In sum, is the patient's right to choose being respected to the extent possible in ethics and law?</i></p>
<p>❖ QUALITY OF LIFE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Principles of Beneficence and Nonmaleficence and Respect for Autonomy</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the prospects, with or without treatment, for a return to normal life? 2. What physical, mental, and social deficits is the patient likely to experience even if treatment succeeds? 3. On what grounds can anyone judge that some quality of life would be undesirable for a patient who cannot make or express such a judgment? 4. Are there biases that might prejudice the provider's evaluation of the patient's quality of life? 5. What ethical issues arise concerning improving or enhancing the patient's quality of life? 6. Do quality of life assessments raise any questions regarding changes in treatment plans? 7. Is there any plan and rationale to forgo treatment? 8. Are there plans for comfort and palliative care? 	<p>❖ CONTEXTUAL FEATURES</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Principle of Justice/Fairness</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there family issues that might influence treatment decisions? 2. Are there provider issues that might influence treatment decisions? 3. Are there financial and economic factors? 4. Are there religious or cultural factors? 5. Are there limits on confidentiality? 6. Are there problems of allocation of resources? 7. How does the law affect treatment decisions? 8. Is clinical research or teaching involved? 9. Is there any conflict of interest on the part of the providers or the institution?