

Editorial

Ethics and interprofessional care

This issue explores the ethical bases, conflicts and dilemmas besetting contemporary health and social care from an interprofessional and international perspective through a series of invited papers.

The material encompasses ethical dilemmas in decision making about access to care: issues of management and resources; professional role conflict engendered by ethical principles; the moral basis of teamwork; information exchange between professional groups; and whether ethical codes have reached the limit of their usefulness.

Rob Irvine and his colleagues in Australia question whether normative ethical approaches offer a sufficient basis to understand the complexities of interprofessional care, which, they argue, can only be understood by appreciating the multiplicity of subjective positions within and between professions. No one single method or ethical theory will suffice, nor can any one profession or agency provide for all the client's health and welfare needs. Professionals are therefore under a moral obligation to co-operate.

Geoffrey Hunt and Arie Van Der Arend report the findings of a comparative study of Accident and Emergency services in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Their study draws upon interviews with senior professionals triggered by discussion of hypothetical scenarios designed to highlight ethical issues. Key issues included confidentiality, informed consent, respect for autonomy and human rights with reference to information exchange and collaboration between Accident and Emergency staff and with other agencies.

Mary Dombeck and Tobie Olsan focus on the ethical dilemmas inherent in managed care in the United States, designed both to contain costs and retain quality of care. The means to resolve such conflicts, the authors suggest, would be for more managed care organisations to enter into dialogue with patients, professional staff and other key stakeholders to draw up ethical guidelines to inform decision making.

Bridget Penhale explores the contentious and problematic arena of charging older people for residential care in England from the perspective of care managers and lawyers. Ethical issues abound, especially for the care managers, not least the ambiguity built into their role and the intrusiveness of the financial assessment process.

David Seedhouse from New Zealand questions the assumption that codes of ethics are supported by a set of clear, ethical principles and agreed ethical standards. In their place, he offers a 'foundations theory of health', applied to a case study, which argues for a shared ethical bond between health and social care professionals. Don Hill from Oxford responds.

This issue includes two other articles. Sonja Zorga offers a developmental-educational model for supervision during life-long learning which resonates far beyond Slovenia from where she writes. Diane Barnes and Richard Hugman from Australia continue our occasional series edited by Charles Engel with a profound, self-critical and wide-ranging review of social work. The authors bring readers back to the theme of ethics—social justice, respect for

persons and anti-discrimination—in the search for codes to which all social workers can subscribe world-wide that carry implications for all the helping professions and their relationships.

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