

**TOOL FOR PRACTICE:
APPROACHING ETHICAL DECISIONS**

When faced with an ethical dilemma, consider the following questions:

1. What health issues are involved?
2. What ethical issues are involved?
3. What further information is necessary before a judgment can be made?
4. Who will be affected by this decision? (Include the decision-maker and other caregivers if they will be affected emotionally or professionally.)
5. What are the values and opinions of the people involved?
6. What conflicts exist between the values and ethical standards of the people involved?
7. Must a decision be made and, if so, who should make it?
8. What alternatives are available?
9. For each alternative, what are the ethical justifications?
10. For each alternative, what are the possible outcomes?

Note:

You will find this set of questions a useful reference tool for the activities on the following pages.

Activity 1-2.
Ethical Decision-Making

Your mentee relates the following case and asks for assistance: Mr. Martinez sustained debilitating injuries as the result of an automobile accident. He suffered severe sub-cortical brain damage significantly impairing his physical and cognitive functioning. His injuries have left him totally paralyzed on the left side. He is on a ventilator, cannot speak or eat, and has no bladder or bowel control. Mr. Martinez is conscious and has some awareness of his surroundings. He communicates to a very minimal degree through head nods. His physicians say that he does not have, nor will he ever have, the ability to make decisions regarding the withdrawal of life-support equipment.

Mr. Martinez is a 35-year-old Latino man who is married with three children, ages 7 years to 18 months of age. He and his wife have been married for nine years. They came to the United States two years ago and speak very little English. Their access to an interpreter has been sporadic, so your mentee, who speaks Spanish fluently, has been caring for Mr. Martinez when she is on duty. She has learned that they come from a large family and have a very strong Catholic faith. Mr. Martinez has no durable power of attorney for health care, and his wife has agonized over her decision, but tells the mentee that she knows her husband would have declined life support equipment given his medical condition and prognosis, and asks that he be removed from the ventilator.

Mr. Martinez' mother and sister arrived from Mexico upon learning of his accident. Neither speaks English and, through an interpreter, indicates that they both disagree with his wife on her decision to have him removed from the ventilator. They know he would want to live for his children and that his faith would never permit him to make such a decision and he would never give up, no matter what. The family and Mr. Martinez' primary care physician have asked the Ethics Committee to meet and provide consultation on this matter. The mentee has been invited to the Ethics Committee meeting as well, and she asks you what she needs to do to prepare.

What is/are the ethical dilemma(s) here? How would you assist the mentee to prepare?
