sciendo

CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING REPORTS

E-ISSN 2450-8594

CEER 2022; 32 (3): 0240-0247
DOI: 10.2478/ceer-2022-0038
Original Research Article

(ECO)ETHICAL ISSUES IN ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Martyna MYSZOGRAJ[1]
University of Zielona Góra, Poland

A b s t r a c t

Ethics issues are present in the daily life of every human being. This paper presents an overview of difficult, yet everyday ethics dilemmas, and general rules and tools helping in making ethical choices. These tools are: distinguishing facts from values, reasoning from principles, defining terms and clarifying concepts, comparing cases, thought experiments, logic, and recognizing and avoiding errors in reasoning. But ethical issues also appear on a bigger scale in every social group, including organizations. The paper contains a literature review and an analysis of it applied to the present day. The analysis includes topics of medical ethics, business ethics and ecoethics, and was conducted according to the basic tools used in ethical problem solving. There are also discussions about a key condition for performing ethical analysis, that is, the distinction between ethics and morality. An ethical solution is dictated by logical principles and based on facts, while respecting the tools of ethical reasoning. In contrast, accepted values are also taken into account when interpreting events morally.

Keywords: ethics, medical ethics, healthcare, ecoethics

[1] Corresponding author: 3th year Biomedical Engineering student, University of Zielona Góra, Poland, myszograj.martyna@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

"There are no moral phenomena - there is only a moral interpretation of phenomena".

These are universal and extremely apt words of Friedrich Nietzsche, which define the importance of morality in the evaluation of events. Morality is a set of principles that can be dictated by, for example, culture or religion, like the Decalogue for Christians. Therefore, it is impossible to define a universally moral phenomenon. The branch of philosophy that deals with the study of morality and the analysis of the basis and consequences of moral precepts, as well as determining the ethicality of phenomena is ethics.

Ethics should be the basis of all decisions made by humans. To determine the ethical value of decisions made, eight tools of ethical reasoning are used. These tools are: distinguishing facts from values, reasoning from principles, defining terms and clarifying concepts, comparing cases, thought experiments, logic, and recognizing and avoiding errors in reasoning. Ethical analysis requires distinguishing facts from values because the facts, i.e., evidence of the actual state of affairs, should be primarily evaluated. The values considered in the analysis should be argued on the basis of facts and as objectively as possible. It is also important to define key terms. In the case of a dispute between two or more parties, it is important that each party use terms defined in the same way, while having a general understanding of the definitions. The case comparison tool involves presenting different situations involving the same ethical problem and basing the argument on that. Thought experiments are a tool that uses imagined examples of situations to verify an argument. One of the most famous thought experiments is Robert Nozick's " The Experience Machine" [6,7]. It is an experiment designed to answer the question of whether pleasant experiences alone can make a person's life meaningful. According to R. Nozick, the answer is negative. The last tools used in ethical analysis are logic and seeing and avoiding fallacies in reasoning. That is, arguments should directly derive from facts and be consistent with the principles of logic and evidence.

2. ETHICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Ethics is concerned with the functioning of not only the individual, but also larger groups of people. An organization is an intentional social group. Most often, however, organizations are associated with business activities. A special section of ethics, relating to behavior in such organizations is business ethics, which is a set of standards for reliable and responsible business conduct towards people with whom they work, including customers. Such actions should primarily comply

with the principles of ethics, but also with the law. Ethics in the organization includes not only the decisions made by the company, but also the norms of behavior of those employed [1].
Organizations, striving to minimize costs and maximize profits, are often forced to make controversial decisions concerning, among others, the choice of business partners and actions towards competitors. The basis for the actions taken should be business ethics. The basic values of business ethics in an organization include accountability, transparency, ethical behavior and active presence in the environment. Responsibility means that the company is prepared to take responsibility for the impact it has on the environment (including taking responsibility for any damage and withdrawal of actions that cause damage). Transparency of an organization is the provision of information by an organization about its decisions and activities that relate to or have an impact on society and the environment [8]. Ethical behavior is behavior that is guided by ethical principles and integrity. An organization's active presence in the environment should be based on awareness of impact on the environment, interaction and local activity. To maintain ethics among employees, organizations are increasingly deciding to create a code of ethics. Such a code is a list of clearly formulated rules, which is presented to all employees at every professional level. This makes it possible to eliminate possible misunderstandings, or misunderstandings in the field of behavior at work.

3. HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

A specific example of an organization where ethical issues are particularly prominent are medical facilities. Employees, i.e., doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals, are often forced to make difficult decisions on short notice. Consideration of the ethicality of decisions made by this professional group is dealt with by a special field - medical ethics. It is based on fundamental principles of ethics, but also takes into account the unique conditions involved in the problems under consideration. Philosophy and science also play an important role in the ethical analysis of medical practice. Science deals with the validity of the proposed treatment, whereas philosophy deals with the justification of specific ethical choices.

3.1. Principles of medical ethics

There are four fundamental principles of medical ethics - respect for patient autonomy, doing good, doing no evil, and justice [4,12].
Patient autonomy is defined as the ability to think and decide, and to act freely on those decisions. Respecting patient autonomy requires health care providers and

families to show support for decisions and to act accordingly (even when those decisions are considered wrong). The principles of "doing good" and "doing no evil" complement each other. The principle of doing good requires doing good to the patient, for example, by offering appropriate treatment. However, it is important to emphasize who decides what is good for the patient. Research findings and diagnosis based on scientific knowledge and facts are of great importance. However, the final decision about what is good should belong to the patient - this follows from the principle of respect for his autonomy. Therefore, the opinion based on moral principles of the medical personnel should not influence the decision to undertake medical procedures, and even less should the use of the so-called "conscience clause" be allowed, which permits refraining from performing health services which are against the doctor's conscience. The principle of doing no evil, on the other hand, emphasizes that decisions about treatment should be dictated primarily by the good of the patient and should never lead to harm, i.e. worsening of the state of health. The last principle of medical ethics is justice. This principle states that all limited resources (e.g., money, time, ICU beds, medications) should be equitably shared - people in the same medical situation should have access to the same health services. However, this is difficult to achieve. Especially in countries where healthcare is partially or fully paid for.
These rules also apply to undertaking CPR. By default, the initiation of resuscitation is accepted, but in accordance with the patient's right to autonomy, it is possible to refuse to perform this medical procedure by signing the appropriate document in advance. The exception is suicide attempts, which could be seen as a refusal to save a life. However, in such a situation, there is no way to confirm consent and determine the capacity to make such a decision, unlike a patient in the hospital, who is informed of the possible course of treatment and consequences before signing the document on refusal of the medical procedure [2].

3.2. Ecoethics in healthcare facilities

As healthcare facilities are a form of organization, therefore they also should stick to the rules dictated by business ethics. The basic values of business ethics in an organization include accountability, transparency, ethical behavior and active presence in the environment. The three first-mentioned rules can be easily interpreted while referring to healthcare facilities - an organization has to always be prepared to take responsibility for the impact it has on the environment or person (including taking responsibility for any damage and withdrawal of actions that cause damage), all information about its decisions and activities that relate to or have an impact on patients and the environment has to be provided, its behavior should be guided by ethical principles and integrity. The last one - active presence

in the environment should be based on awareness of impact on the environment, interaction and local activity, which means that healthcare facilities should not only take care of patients and its own revenues but also the environment and local society [3,5].

Healthcare sector has an important environmental footprint due to, among other things, the consumption of plastic. It is estimated that about 25% of the hospital's waste is plastic [9]. It is necessary to say that elimination of whole medical plastic usage is not possible. But as the role of healthcare facilities is to treat and prevent diseases, and plastic waste is harmful to the environment and thus to human health, usage of single-use plastic should be reduced. Also 15% of waste is considered to be hazardous (toxic, infectious or radioactive) [3].

The production of plastic causes, among others, air pollution dangerous to health [10,11]. The plastic waste, such as packaging or food containers, is harmful for health not only by having a negative impact on the environment. Plastic waste which enters the environment, especially the water areas, does not dissolve but breaks down into even smaller particles. Those elements can be consumed by small organisms and move higher up the food chain, and therefore be found in food. Also plastic food containers can cause health issues, such as stomach ulcers, diarrhea and vomiting in case of PET material. Those ailments can be caused by toxic substances that leach into food or drink due to heat [11].

As the production, use and disposal of plastic can cause health issues it should be one of healthcare facilities' priorities to minimize it by choosing other relevant materials, such as glass, metal or composite materials.

WHO in its "*Guidance for climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable healthcare facilities*" [14] states that healthcare facilities should be encouraged to assess their environmental footprint. Thanks to that there could be set a baseline upon which improvements would be monitored and measured. That would also make it possible to propose an index based on which comparisons between facilities could be made.

What was significantly highlighted was how important it is to state short- and long-term interventions and evaluate improvements. The features that should be monitored and be subject to improvements are health workforce, water, sanitation and waste, energy and infrastructure, technology and products. Smart use of water is particularly important in areas with a tendency to droughts or floods. Excessive energy consumption leads to unjustified fuel waste which involves costs and air pollution. The problem with unjustified consumption of these resources can be solved by promotion of new technologies providing enhanced health service delivery and climate resilience.

The main conclusion made in this guide was that healthcare facilities are impacted by climate change and by their surrounding environments but also accountributing to climate changes and environment degradation through their

emissions and unsustainable practices. It is also important to remember that a satisfying healthcare should contain a skilled and informed workforce; adequate water, sanitation and waste services; energy services; safe, functional and sustainable infrastructure including technologies and products. Reasonable use of those resources would not only be ecological but also would provide access to equal health care for more people.

4. MEDICAL RESEARCH

Today, the area that is subject to the most stringent medical ethics rules is medical research. Ethics committees are set up to check whether the research is designed in accordance with medical ethics. The principles are described, for example, by the Nuremberg Code and the Declaration of Helsinki [15]. These documents were formulated in response to unethical behavior committed by people in the past. During World War II, there were horrific human experiments conducted by Nazi doctors such as J. Mengele known as the Angel of Death from Auschwitz. Therefore, in 1946 (according to some sources in 1947), the Nuremberg Code was established, setting rules for medical research involving human subjects. In 1964, the WMA (World Medical Association) published the Declaration of Helsinki, which was later revised in 2013. Since then, a number of additional regulations have been developed that clarify the principles outlined in the Nuremberg Code and the Declaration of Helsinki. All are based on four fundamental principles of medical ethics (respect for patient autonomy, doing good, doing no evil, and justice). In Poland a Code of Ethics for Research Workers was created in 2012. It was formed on the basis of The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2010). It states that researchers should be guided primarily by conscientiousness, trustworthiness, objectivity, impartiality, independence, reliability and transparency when conducting research and publishing results, and the researcher himself should be characterized by an open approach to discussion and concern for the future of science [13].

5. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, a key condition for making ethical decisions is the distinction between ethics and morality. An ethical solution is dictated by logical principles and based on facts, while respecting the tools of ethical reasoning. In contrast, accepted values, such as those dictated by religion or culture, are also taken into account when interpreting events morally.

Ethics issues take place in every social group, including organizations. It is worth noting that the active presence in the environment also concerns whether the activities of the organization are ecological or have a negative impact on the

environment. An organization whose functioning results, for example, in the poisoning of rivers or air, and which does not try to remove, minimize or compensate for the negative impact on the environment, cannot consider its activities ethical. In view of the contemporary struggle against the negative effects of human activity, this is an issue that should be given more attention. Perhaps, with increased criticism and radicalization of environmental laws, it would be possible to get organizations to change their policies.

The issue of ethical conduct is particularly important in organizations with a medical purpose, where human welfare depends on the decisions made. It is essential that medical personnel make decisions according to medical ethics and the principles it defines, rather than their own worldview and morality.

Given the free will and the ability of people to also make unethical decisions, the principles of ethics should be regulated by the strictest possible laws. Such documents should be clearly described and respected on a global scale. Ethics also concerns inviolable human rights, which should not be subject to discussion, nor should they be described only by national law, which can be changed by current authorities with certain views.

REFERENCES

1. Bińczycki, B 2012. Selected problems of ethical organizational management. Kraków.
2. Bossaert, LL, Perkins, GD, Askitopouloud, H, Raffayf, VI, Greif, R, Haywood, KL, Mentzelopoulos, SD, Nolanj, JP, Voorde P and Xanthos TT 2015, European Resuscitation Council Guidelines for Resuscitation, Section 11. The ethics of resuscitation and end-of-life decisions on behalf of The ethics of resuscitation and end-of-life decisions section Collaborators.
3. Clunies-Ross, Phil. 2019. Plastics in the Environment. Report number: 978-1-877264-39-9.
4. Dunn, M and Hope, T 2020. Medical Ethics: A Very Short Introduction. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź.
5. Ehrlich, P 2009. Ecoethics: Now Central to All Ethics. Journal of Bioethical Inquiry **6**, 417-436.
6. Guido, L 2019. The experience machine and the expertise defense. Philosophical Psychology **32**(2), 257-273.
7. Kelly, I 2021. The Universal pure pleasure machine: Suicide or nirvana?. Philosophical Psychology **34**(8), 1077-1096.
8. Kisiel, A 2015. Etyka a zarządzanie - wybrane problemy [Ethics and management - selected problems]. Sens życia, Filozofuj! **2**, 85-93.
9. Lee, B and Moure-Eraso, R 2002. Analyses of the recycling potential of medical plastic wastes. Waste management (New York, N.Y.) **22**, 461-70.

10. Mortula, M and Ahmad, A 2013. Leaching of Antimony from Bottle Water. Conference: International Conference on Advances in Civil, Structural and Environmental Engineering - ACSEEAt: Zurich, Switzerland.
11. Myszograj, M 2020. Microplastic in Food and Drinking Water - Environmental Monitoring Data, Civil And Environmental Engineering Reports **30**(4), 201-209.
12. Skrzypek, E 2020. Etyka w biznesie – zarządzanie etyczne w organizacji [Ethics in business - ethical management in the organization]. W: Wyzwania społeczne i technologiczne, a nowe trendy w zarządzaniu współczesnymi organizacjami, 65-79.
13. Uchwała nr 10/2012 Zgromadzenia Ogólnego Polskiej Akademii Nauk w sprawie Kodeksu Etyki Pracownika Naukowego [Resolution No. 10/2012 of the General Assembly of the Polish Academy of Sciences on the Code of Ethics for Researchers].
14. WHO Guidance for Climate Resilient and Environmentally Sustainable Health Care Facilities. https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health.
15. WMA declaration of Helsinki – ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. 2022, https://www.wma.net/.

Editor received the manuscript: 11.06.2022