Ethics Committee Consultation Policy – SAMPLE

Subject: Ethics Committee Consultation
Number: 
Effective Date: 
Supersedes SPP #: Dated: 
Approved by: (signature) 
Distribution: 

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:
To provide for prospective review and recommendations regarding individual cases brought to the [insert proper name of ethics committee] by concerned parties directly involved in the case.

Issues that may be addressed by the [insert proper name of ethics committee] include:

• Do-not-resuscitate (DNR) orders.
• Withdrawal of life support.
• Patient hydration/nutrition questions and concerns.
• Disagreement between family members over plan of care.
• Disagreements between family members and care team over plan of care.
• Questions about refusal of treatment.
• Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST) issues/concerns.
• Questions surrounding palliative care.
• Rights of proxies/surrogates.
• Advance directives.

II. STATEMENT OF POLICY:
The goal of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] is to respect the rights and to promote the interests of the patient, clarify the issues, promote mutual education, and support all individuals involved when an ethical question arises regarding the provision of care or services.

In all cases in which someone other than the attending physician brings a case to the attention of the [insert proper name of ethics committee], the attending physician shall be notified immediately that the [insert proper name of ethics committee] has been asked to assist. The attending physician may not veto the involvement of the [insert proper name of ethics committee]. The name of the person who asked for the case review shall not be revealed without his or her permission.

The [insert proper name of ethics committee] may receive or solicit comments from any involved persons. In a case involving care of an infant or minor, every effort will be made to notify the parent(s) regarding the consultation and invite their participation. Patients, their family members, and/or surrogates may be invited to address the [insert proper name of ethics committee] themselves or through a representative.

After hearing from the interested persons, the [insert proper name of ethics committee] may meet in closed session to identify the issues, clarify the problem, and develop appropriate recommendations.
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A physician member of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] will advise the attending physician of the recommendations made by the [insert proper name of ethics committee]. Other involved parties may be notified as appropriate. In addition, the recommendations will be documented in the patient’s medical record. The [insert proper name of ethics committee] may request follow-up on actions taken in each case in which advice was solicited.

In all cases, the responsible medical provider and patient or designee retain the responsibility for the final decision with respect to the course of action chosen.

III. PROCEDURE

1. A concerned individual requesting consultation from the [insert proper name of ethics committee] shall:

   1.1. Between 7:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, call the medical director’s office for assistance in facilitating a meeting of the [insert proper name of ethics committee].

   1.2. At all other times, the page operator will contact the on-call member of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] and the nursing supervisor to assist in facilitating a meeting of the [insert proper name of ethics committee].

2. The on-call member of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] shall consider the facts given by the concerned individual(s) and shall determine whether the concern falls within the purview of the [insert proper name of ethics committee]. If the concern does not fall within the purview of the [insert proper name of ethics committee], the chairperson shall inform the concerned individual and assist the individual to obtain access to the appropriate parties for solution of the problem.

3. A physician member of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] shall notify the attending physician of the request/concern, if the concerned individual is not the attending physician.

4. If the concern falls within the purview of the [insert proper name of ethics committee], the chairperson shall contact the medical director for authorization to proceed and shall call a meeting of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] within 24 hours.

5. At least six members of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] shall meet to:

   5.1. Receive verbal or written comments offered by any involved parties.

   5.2. Clarify the issues.

   5.3. Develop appropriate recommendations.

6. The [insert proper name of ethics committee] chairperson/designee shall:

   6.1. Inform the medical director of the provided recommendations.

   6.2. Offer advice to involved individuals.

   6.3. Inform the attending physician of the recommendations of the [insert proper name of ethics committee].
6.4. Write a note in the chart indicating the date and nature of the consultation and the recommendations made and give the attending physician a copy of the same note.

7. The attending physician shall countersign the note in the chart to document that he/she has reviewed the recommendations of the [insert proper name of ethics committee].

8. The attending physician and concerned individual shall inform the chairman of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] regarding actions taken.

9. The convening of the [insert proper name of ethics committee] shall not preclude any of the usual administrative reporting or management of problems that take place.

10. Deliberations by the [insert proper name of ethics committee] shall not preclude the attending physician from taking appropriate urgent action.

This policy has been adapted from policies and procedures developed by the George Washington University Hospital Ethics Committee and the University of Rochester Highland Hospital Ethics Committee.