



# Healthcare Ethics and Professional Conduct: Ethics Consultation, Open Disclosure and Boundaries



## **Healthcare Ethics and Professional Conduct: Ethics Consultation, Open Disclosure and Boundaries**

### **Introduction:**

Healthcare ethics problems rarely arrive labelled: a frail patient refuses a procedure the family demands, a colleague accepts industry hospitality, a medication error goes unmentioned at the bedside, or an intensive care bed must be allocated between two patients. Teams without a shared reasoning method decide inconsistently and lose patient trust. This Core Concept course gives clinicians, nurse leaders and healthcare managers a structured way to analyse dilemmas with the four principles, run an ethics consultation, disclose harm honestly and address unprofessional behaviour. Participants produce a Department Professional Conduct Charter supported by written ethics case consultations.

### **Course Objectives:**

- Analyse clinical dilemmas by weighing respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice with a structured four-box case method
- Assess decision-making capacity and apply substituted judgement and best-interests reasoning when a patient cannot decide
- Resolve confidentiality, boundary and conflict-of-interest dilemmas using documented decision criteria
- Conduct a clinical ethics consultation from referral and fact-gathering to a written recommendation
- Lead an open disclosure conversation and apology after an adverse event and plan follow-up support for patient and staff
- Design a departmental professional conduct charter with a graded response pathway for unprofessional behaviour

### **Target Audience:**

- Physicians and senior clinicians who make treatment decisions with patients, families and surrogate decision-makers
  - Nurse managers and charge nurses who oversee bedside conduct, boundaries and escalation on wards and units
  - Department and service-line managers accountable for staff professionalism and patient complaints
  - Members and coordinators of clinical ethics committees and consultation services
  - Allied health and pharmacy leads who face resource, consent and confidentiality dilemmas in daily practice
  - Patient experience and clinical governance staff who support disclosure after harm
-

## **Course Outline:**

### **Day 1: Foundations of Healthcare Ethics and Professionalism**

- Principlism: Respect for Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-Maleficence and Justice
- Ethical Theories Behind Clinical Choices: Duty-Based, Consequence-Based and Virtue Approaches
- Professionalism Attributes: Integrity, Accountability, Altruism and Respect for Dignity
- Healthcare Ethics Versus Health Law: Where Moral Duty Exceeds Legal Minimum
- Departmental Ethics Climate Self-Assessment Survey

### **Day 2: Ethical Reasoning Models and Clinical Ethics Consultation**

- Four-Box Case Method: Medical Indications, Patient Preferences, Quality of Life and Contextual Features
- Clinical Ethics Committee Functions: Case Review, Policy Advice and Staff Education
- Ethics Consultation Process: Referral, Fact Gathering, Stakeholder Meeting and Written Recommendation
- Facilitated Mediation Between Families and Care Teams in Values Conflicts
- Ethics Consultation Note Template and Chart Documentation Standard

### **Day 3: Autonomy, Capacity, Confidentiality and Professional Boundaries**

- Decision-Making Capacity Assessment: Understanding, Appreciation, Reasoning and Expressing a Choice
- Surrogate Decisions: Advance Directives, Substituted Judgement and Best-Interests Standard
- Confidentiality Dilemmas: Family Requests, Third-Party Risk and Workplace Health Information
- Therapeutic Boundaries: Gifts, Dual Relationships, Social Media Contact and Treating Relatives
- Conflict-of-Interest Declaration Register: Industry Hospitality, Referral Incentives and Research Funding

### **Day 4: Harm Disclosure, Scarce Resources, Elderly Care and Unprofessional Conduct**

- Open Disclosure Conversation: Acknowledgement, Apology, Explanation and Follow-Up Plan
  - Second-Victim Support for Clinicians Involved in Adverse Events
  - Resource Allocation Ethics: Triage Criteria, Waiting-List Fairness and Medical Futility Disputes
  - Elderly Care Ethics: Frailty, Covert Medication, Restraint Use and End-of-Life Preferences
  - Graded Response Pathway for Disruptive and Unprofessional Behaviour: Informal Chat to Formal Referral
-

## Day 5: Ethics Case Consultations and the Department Professional Conduct Charter

- Research Ethics Overview: Ethics Committee Review, Consent to Participate and Vulnerable Groups
- Case Consultation Clinic: Treatment Refusal by a Capacious Older Patient
- Case Consultation Clinic: Undisclosed Medication Error and Family Complaint
- Department Professional Conduct Charter Drafting: Values, Expected Behaviours and Escalation Routes
- Charter Presentation and Peer Critique Before a Mock Ethics Committee Panel

## Skills You Will Gain:

- Principle-Based Dilemma Analysis
- Capacity and Surrogate Decision Assessment
- Ethics Consultation Facilitation
- Open Disclosure Communication
- Professional Boundary Management
- Conflict-of-Interest Screening
- Fair Resource Allocation Reasoning
- Professional Conduct Charter Design

## Why Attend This Course:

- Return with a Department Professional Conduct Charter and two written ethics case consultations ready for local adoption
- Handle refusals, family disputes and disclosure conversations with a method the whole team can follow
- Speak with ethics committees, managers and families in precise, shared ethical vocabulary
- Compare dilemmas and conduct practices with clinicians and managers from public, private and specialist care settings

## Conclusion:

Ethical practice in healthcare depends less on good intentions than on a shared method applied under pressure. The course moves from the four principles and professionalism, through structured case analysis and the ethics consultation process, to capacity, confidentiality, boundaries and conflicts of interest, then to open disclosure, scarce resources, elderly care and unprofessional conduct. The final day applies the method to consultation cases and produces a Department Professional Conduct Charter that sets expected behaviours and escalation routes.

---