

ETHICAL DILEMMA

Course: DH 202 Professional Issues II

Submitted to: Ms. Marni Steinberg, RDH

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Scenario: Confidentiality vs. Client Safety

A client, Ms. Brown, visits the dental hygiene clinic and discloses during her medical history update that she tested positive for hepatitis C. She asks the dental hygienist, Laura, to keep this information confidential, as she doesn't want anyone else in the office to know about her condition.

During the appointment, Laura notices that another dental assistant, Sam, was handling Ms. Brown's instruments without gloves before they were sterilized. Laura becomes concerned about the potential risk of transmission to other staff or clients. She is unsure whether to inform the dental office team about Ms. Brown's condition to ensure stricter infection control measures are followed or to respect Ms. Brown's request for confidentiality.

Applying the CDHO Ethical Decision-Making Model

Step 1: Identify the Problem

The ethical dilemma involves a conflict between:

- **Confidentiality (Principle III):** Ms. Brown has the right to control the disclosure of her health information.
- **Client and Public Safety (Principles I & IV - Beneficence & Accountability):** Laura must ensure that proper infection control measures are followed to prevent the transmission of hepatitis C.

The dilemma is whether Laura should disclose Ms. Brown's condition to protect others or respect her right to privacy while ensuring safe infection control practices.

Step 2: Gather Information

- **Facts:**
 - Hepatitis C is a bloodborne virus that can be transmitted through contact with contaminated instruments.
 - Proper sterilization of instruments eliminates the risk of transmission, but improper handling before sterilization poses a risk.
- **Applicable policies, laws, regulations**
 - Ms. Brown has the right to confidentiality under the **Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004)** and **CDHO Code of Ethics, Principle III: Privacy and Confidentiality**.
 - Infection prevention is mandated by the **CDHO Standards of Practice (Section 6: Infection Control)** and **DHA-Professional Misconduct Regulation (Ontario Regulation 218/94, Section 1.2)**, which states that failing to maintain infection control is professional misconduct.
- **Stakeholders' Views:**
 - **Ms. Brown:** Wants her diagnosis to remain confidential.
 - **Laura (Dental Hygienist):** Has a professional obligation to maintain confidentiality but also to protect public safety.
 - **Sam (Dental Assistant):** Unknowingly put themselves and others at risk.
 - **Other Clients & Staff:** Expect a safe and hygienic environment.

Step 3: Clarify the Problem

- **Ethical Principles at Stake:**
 - **Confidentiality:** Ms. Brown's right to privacy must be upheld unless an exception applies (e.g., significant risk to others).
 - **Beneficence & Non-maleficence:** Laura must act in the best interest of clients and staff by ensuring proper infection control.
 - **Accountability:** Laura is responsible for following CDHO standards and infection control protocols.

Step 4: Identify the Options

1. **Respect confidentiality and say nothing** while ensuring all instruments are properly sterilized.
2. **Reinforce infection control protocols** to all staff without disclosing Ms. Brown's condition.
3. **Speak privately with Sam** about proper instrument handling without mentioning Ms. Brown.
4. **Discuss the situation with the clinic's infection control officer or dentist** without revealing Ms. Brown's identity.
5. **Disclose Ms. Brown's condition to the team** to ensure heightened infection control measures.

Step 5: Assess the Options

Option 1: Say nothing

- **Pros:** Fully respects Ms. Brown's confidentiality.
- **Cons:** Does not address the risk of improper infection control, potentially endangering staff and clients.

Option 2: Reinforce infection control protocols for all staff

- **Pros:** Protects confidentiality while improving infection control practices.
- **Cons:** Reductant for those who regularly follow protocols.

Option 3: Speak privately with Sam about proper instrument handling

- **Pros:** Addresses the issue without breaching confidentiality.
- **Cons:** Does not ensure that all staff consistently follow protocols.

Option 4: Discuss infection control concerns with the clinic's infection control officer or dentist

- **Pros:** Ensures infection control improvements while maintaining confidentiality.
- **Cons:** May not immediately correct Sam's actions.

Option 5: Disclose Ms. Brown's condition to the team

- **Pros:** Ensures increased vigilance and prevents potential transmission.
- **Cons:** Breaches confidentiality and may violate PHIPA unless there is a serious and immediate risk.

Step 6: Choose a Course of Action

The best approach is a combination of **Options 2, 3, and 4**:

1. **Speak privately with Sam** about proper infection control practices without mentioning Ms. Brown.
2. **Reinforce infection control training for all staff** to ensure proper handling of instruments.
3. **Discuss general infection control concerns with the clinic's infection control officer or dentist** without revealing Ms. Brown's diagnosis.

This approach maintains **client confidentiality** while **ensuring a safe working environment**.

Step 7: Implement the Action

- Laura speaks to Sam about always wearing gloves when handling contaminated instruments.
- A team meeting is arranged to review and reinforce infection control protocols.
- Laura discusses infection control procedures with the clinic's infection control officer to improve compliance.

Step 8: Evaluate Outcomes

- **Potential Outcomes:**
 - Infection control is improved without compromising Ms. Brown's confidentiality.
 - Sam and other staff are more aware of proper sterilization protocols.
 - Ms. Brown's trust in Laura and the clinic remains intact.
 - Future risks of transmission are reduced.

- **Reflection Questions from the Code of Ethics:**
 - **What are the outcomes of my decision in terms of client health and well-being?**
 - The decision upholds safety for both Ms. Brown and the dental team while respecting her confidentiality.
 - **Would I behave differently or choose another option should the situation arise again?**
 - If a similar situation occurs, Laura could proactively ensure infection control training is in place to prevent such dilemmas.

Conclusion

- By following this approach, Laura upholds **confidentiality, beneficence, and accountability**, ensuring both Ms. Brown's privacy and the safety of the dental team and clients.

LITERATURE CITED

College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario. [Cdho](#) code of ethics. Available at: <https://cdho.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Code-of-Ethics.pdf>. Accessed January 25, 2025.

Ethical Dilemma Assignment
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	Mark Earned	Maximum Mark
Originality: (scenario is original; not duplicated from CDHO website)	5	5
Spelling, grammar, and sentence structure	8	10
Structure and Coherence (paper is well organized and easy to follow, uses proper Vancouver style referencing, and contains a title page)	10	10
<i>Application of Ethical Decision-Making Model</i>		
Step 1: Identify the problem (identify in a preliminary way the nature or challenge of the problem)	5	5
Step 2: Gather information (discuss all relevant information including factual information; sequence of events; and applicable policies, laws, regulations, and views of stakeholders) Please ensure you mention laws and regulations from the CDHO Standards of Practice, DHA-Professional Misconduct Regulation, RHPA, and any applicable chapters from the CDHO Registrants' Handbook (include in-text referencing to the documents and section number you found the information).	10	15
Step 3: Clarify the problem (clarify and elaborate the problem based on additional information obtained. Identify the ethical principles at stake)	8	10
Step 4: Identify the options (identify the various options for action)	10	10
Step 5: Assess options (analyze each option stated in step 4 providing the pros and cons for each)	8	10
Step 6: Choose course of action (Now that options have been identified and assessed, clearly state which option you chose and a brief justification for the decision)	5	5
Step 7: Implement action (provide details on how you went about implementing the course of action stated in step 6)	5	5
Step 8: Evaluate outcomes (In paragraph form, provide an analysis of your decision and evaluate likely potential outcomes of the decision, not just the outcome that you hope for. In addition, answer any two of the five questions asked in the Code of Ethics listed under step 8)	11	15
Total	85%	100
Value to final Grade (15%)		

You're analysis was a bit brief but it was accurate. You showed a solid understanding of the CDHO Ethical decision-making module.