Real-World Ethics for Nutrition Professionals: From Code to Practice

North Dakota Long-Term Care Association – Fall 2025

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Disclosures

- Both Julie and Angie work for the University of North Dakota.
  - They have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

UND LEADS
A STRATEGIC VISION FOR UND

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Learning | A Sense of Wonder

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will:

1. Discuss how members of the nutrition services team, including Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs), Nutrition and Dietetics Technicians, Registered (NDTRs), and Certified Dietary Managers, Certified Food Protection Professionals (CDM, CFPPs), apply ethical standards in daily practice.
2. Review the specific Code of Ethics relevant to their roles.
3. Engage with a structured ethical decision-making model.
4. Collaborate on real-life scenarios and case studies.

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WHAT IS ETHICS?

Talk with your table for about 2 minutes about your interpretation of the word “ethics.”

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ETHICS: Definition

Merrium-Webster

a: a set of moral principles, a theory or system of moral values

b: the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethics

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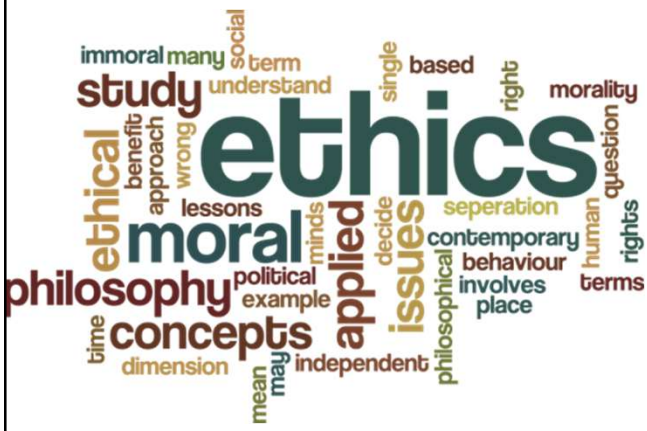

ETHICS: What is it?

"In the simplest terms, morals are ideas pertaining to an individual's beliefs about right and wrong, whereas ethics represent agreed upon codes of behavior."

(Boyce, 2017)

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CODE OF ETHICS

JUNE 2024

SECTION 1

The Certifying Board for Dietary Managers® has a formal policy, the Code of Ethics for the Certified Dietary Manager, Certified Food Protection Professional and procedures which incorporate due process, for the discipline of credential holders. The Code of Ethics and procedures include the sanction of revocation of the certification, for conduct which clearly indicates incompetence, unethical behavior and physical or mental impairment affecting the performance of the Certified Dietary Manager, Certified Food Protection Professional.

SECTION 2

Let's Compare

Take about 10 minutes to read through the Code of Ethics for both certifying boards and discuss with your table the similarities between the two Codes.

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Purpose	Integrity/Honesty	Competence	Compliance with Laws	Respect
Protect the public, clients, and profession. Applies to credentialed professionals & candidates. Outline ethical practice guidelines to aid with decision-making.	Requires honesty, fairness, objectivity, & avoidance of misleading information. Must be truthful and evidence-based. Report ethical violations. Report conflicts of interest.	Must practice within Scope of Practice. Refer as needed. Maintain competence through continuing education. Step back if personal circumstances impair practice.	Must comply with applicable laws and regulations. (e.g. HIPAA, ADA, EEOC, FMLA, OSHA, Resident Rights, Comprehensive Resident Assessment, Care Planning, etc.)	Respect individual needs and cultural differences. Provide non-discriminative care and leadership. Provide objective evaluations of colleagues, students, or applicants. Do not harm.

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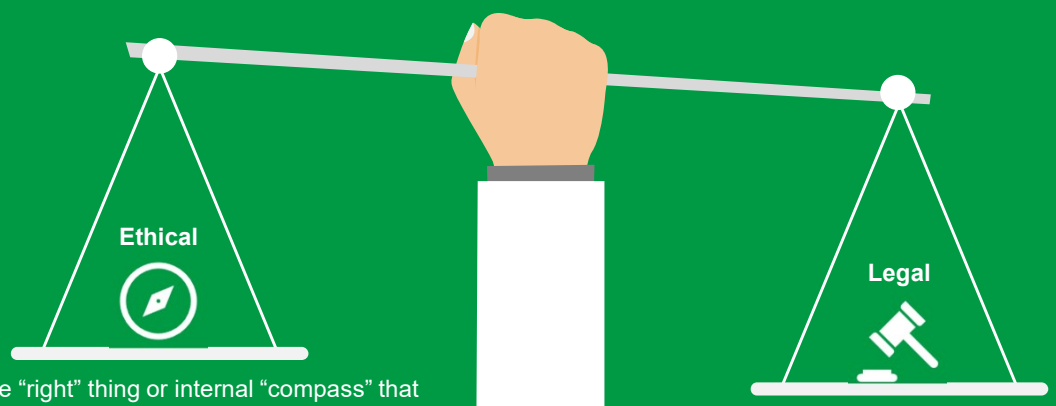
ETHICAL VS. LEGAL



- The “right” thing or internal “compass” that guides our decisions.
- Shapes morality, social and personal rules, behaviors, and judgements
- Violations might elicit disapproval, removal from a group/job/profession, and condemnation.

- Created to maintain social order
- Statues and case law
- Minimum standard for social behavior
- Violations result in enforceable punishment, disgrace, and imprisonment.

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(Lee & Kohn, 2024)

Process for Ethical Decision-Making

1 State an ethical dilemma.

- What are the relevant factors?
- Does the issue r/t ethics, or does it pertain to something else, such as employment or business dispute?
- Who has a stake in the situation?
- What are the potential implications?
- Is more info needed?

2 Consider the dilemma in question in relation to ethical theory.

- What are the competing values?
- Which principles of ethical theory apply?
  - Autonomy
  - Non-maleficence
  - Beneficence
  - Justice

3 Apply the Code of Ethics.

- Which principle(s) of the Code will aide in making a decision?
  - Competence (Non-maleficence)
  - Integrity (Autonomy)
  - Professionalism (Beneficence)
  - Social Responsibility (Justice)

4 Select the best alternative to the situation & be prepared to justify your decision.

- What options exist to resolve the conflict?
- Are there any internal factors that may affect your decision?
- How will the decision affect others?
- Is there enough information to justify the decision if challenged?

5 Develop strategies to implement the decision.

- Do leaders within the organization need to be involved?
- What steps are needed to implement the final decision?

6 Evaluate the outcomes & identify strategies to prevent it from recurring.

- How will the outcome be monitored?
- Do others need to be involved with identifying strategies to prevent its reoccurrence?

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ETHICAL SITUATIONS FOR NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS

Round-Table Practice with Case Study Discussions

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Learning | A Sense of Wonder

DILEMMA: STICKY FINGERS

- An employee comes to you and reports their suspicions that a co-worker is stealing food from the freezer.
- This same reporting employee was investigated a year ago for cash register theft (unproven); they blamed the now-accused co-worker above for trying to get them fired.
- They strongly dislike the co-worker and have consistently talked bad about them to other staff since the cash register accusations.

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Equity | Opportunities for Success

DILEMMA – MAKIN' BACON?

- The morning cook reports that there hasn't been enough bacon to serve with breakfast for the past 2 weeks.
- They verified that one case has been ordered and delivered weekly, but there has only been the equivalent of one half of the case available to serve.
- Upon further research you find that the night cook reports a dietary aid has been leaving their backpack near the walk-in fridge for the past couple of weeks. This leads you to suspect possible pilferage by the night dietary aid.

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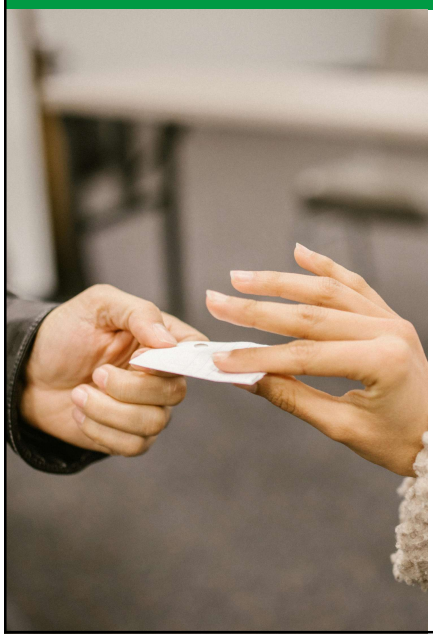
Affinity | A Sense of Belonging



DILEMMA – EASY A?

- A CDM, CFPP is serving as a preceptor for student who is enrolled in the online Dietary Manager Training Course at UND. Like all preceptors he has access to the answers from the preceptor's manual.
- The CDM, CFPP is so busy with his job and at home that he feels he really doesn't have time to precept the student.
- He is thinking about giving the student the login information for the preceptor site so the student can check answers as needed since he is so busy. He will still sign off on the lesson, saying that he spent the time reviewing the lessons.

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Discovery | A Love of Inquiry and Creativity

DILEMMA: COVER ME?

- A colleague that you work with was scheduled to attend the NDLTC Association Meeting today for CEU's and to network. Two days ago, your colleague called and told you that she was short staffed and could not attend the meeting. She really needed the hours for her certification and asked you to pick up her registration materials (since she had already paid for the conference).
- As a good friend, you picked up her bag and materials and delivered them to her – unsure of what she was going to do with them, but the bag was nice.
- The colleague used the program book with the certificate to log the event as if she had attended.

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Service | A Commitment to People and Communities

DILEMMA: AUDITED!

- Consider your colleague from the “Cover Me?” dilemma, who did not attend the NDLTC Association Meeting, but logged the hours as if she did.
- She received notification that she is being audited by CBDM. She calls to thank you for bringing her the materials so she could submit the certificate of attendance.
- You are torn. You are her friend and don’t want to be a “tattletale.” But you are a professional bound to a Code of Ethics.

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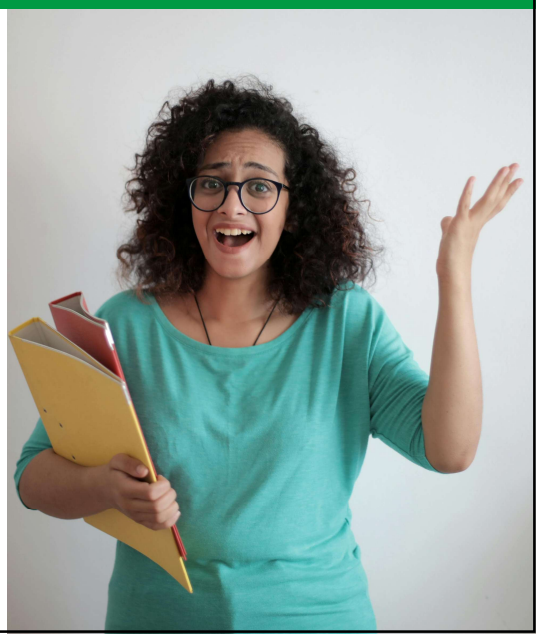
Learning | A Sense of Wonder

DILEMMA: SMELLY SITUATION

- You are aware that there are sewer pipes above your food production area in your workplace kitchen. One day, the pipe breaks and spews sewer water over your production area and your employees.
- You know that this is a reportable incident, and the state health department must be notified.
- The maintenance director for your building insists that the state health department will not be called, because this will call attention to your facility through the media.



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Equity | Opportunities for Success

DILEMMA: HIPAA HOP HOORAY?!

- A room service aide delivering meals to a terminally ill patient learns the patient is very depressed. The aide contacts her church pastor, who is not affiliated with the hospital or the patient, to visit for counsel. They do.
- You, as the aide's supervisor, were not unaware of the aide's actions until a week later during a care conference with the patient and their family.
- The aide states that she acted with compassion but acknowledges she doesn't know if the patient follows a religion and that she didn't have permission to refer to her pastor.

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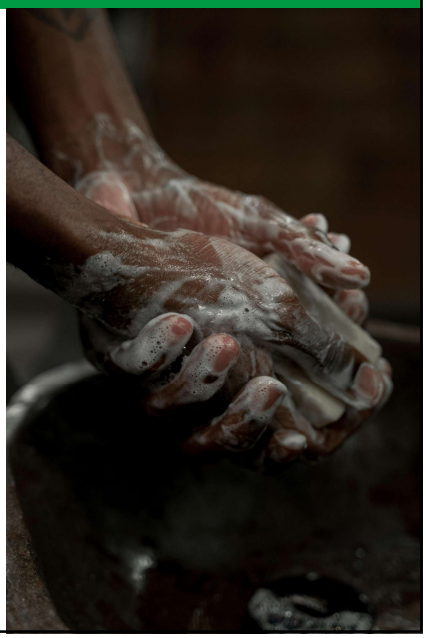
Affinity | A Sense of Belonging

DILEMMA: YOU WASH MY HANDS & I'LL WASH YOURS?

- Your kitchen staff complain of cracked, dry hands from frequent washing.
- You talk with your chemical rep, and he recommends a gentler, more expensive foaming soap which is purchased and staff love.
- Nursing staff hear about it and start coming into the kitchen to use it too, straining the kitchen budget.
- The chemical rep offers you a $500 Amazon gift card if you convince nursing to switch to the same soap.



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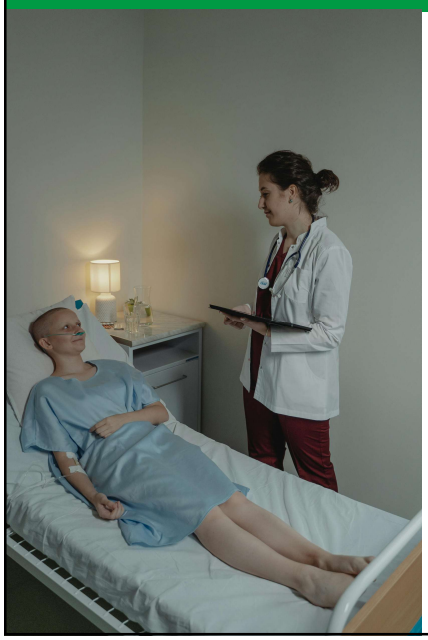
Discovery | A Love of Inquiry and Creativity



DILEMMA: WHAT'S MY ROLE?

- Jenna is a 30-year-old single mom with two young children. She has end-stage cancer, is a patient in the care center where you work, and is your best friend outside of work.
- She has shared that she knows her mom wants her to get a tube feeding, but she doesn't want any extraordinary care once she can no longer eat or drink solid foods and thin liquids.
- The past two weeks have been challenging for Jenna, and she is refusing to eat and has been taking in a negligent amount calories.
- The doctor and her family believe she could live several more months with a feeding tube.

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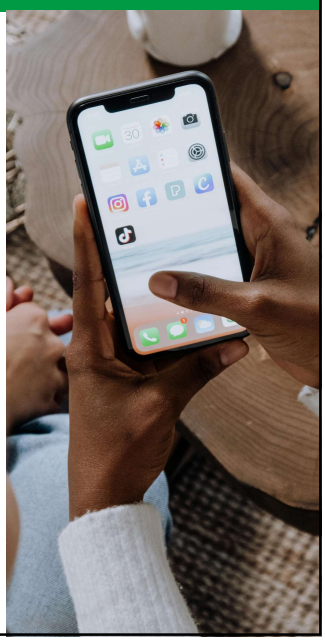
DILEMMA: LIKE, SUBSCRIBE, AND COMMENT

- Rosie is a 19-year-old dining assistant. She helps residents who need assistance dining due to mobility or cognitive difficulties. She is also an aspiring social media influencer under the username "RosiePosiePuddingAndPie"
- HIPAA and acceptable social media behavior is discussed with everyone upon hire. However, over the last 48 hours your office has received an onslaught of phone calls, social media tags, & 1-star reviews regarding a derogatory video Rosie posted about how "gross" she thought pureed food was as she was assisting a nonverbal resident. The resident's face, the facility dining room, the pureed meal, and Rosie's face along with her scrub top and facility name badge were visible in the video.



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Things you can do to maintain ethical practice:

1. Read and refer to your credential's Code of Ethics often.
2. Utilize the "Process for Ethical Decision Making" when you are unclear of what you should do.
3. Stay abreast of updates to your credential's Code of Ethics.
4. Read ethics articles in available resources such as The Edge Magazine and the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
5. When in doubt, reach out to your administrator or supervisor for guidance. Your credential's governing bodies are also there to serve – contact CBDM or CDR with questions!

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"The heart of the unwritten code of ethics of leadership is the expectation that leaders will act in the best interest of those they serve and their followers."

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Service | A Commitment to People and Communities

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