

Ethical Dilemma Examples

Example 1: Healthcare (Nursing) - End-of-Life Decisions

- **Scenario:** A nurse is providing care to a terminally ill patient who is experiencing unbearable pain. The patient requests euthanasia, which is illegal in their country. The ethical dilemma arises between the nurse's duty to respect the patient's autonomy (the patient's right to make decisions about their own body) and the ethical principles of beneficence (doing good) and non-maleficence (avoiding harm), which may conflict with euthanasia.
- **Considerations:** The nurse must evaluate the legal compliance of assisting in the patient's request, balance the patient's wishes with their ethical duty to provide compassionate care, and consider how to present evidence regarding end-of-life care that respects the patient's dignity while adhering to professional standards.

Example 2: Business Ethics - Environmental Responsibility

- **Scenario:** A CEO of a large corporation discovers that their company is engaging in harmful environmental practices, such as dumping waste into nearby rivers. The CEO faces the ethical dilemma of deciding whether to publicly address the issue, which would require costly environmental remediation, or to keep the situation under wraps to maintain the company's profits and reputation.
- **Considerations:** The CEO must balance business ethics and the responsibility to shareholders with the corporate responsibility to protect the environment. The dilemma involves evaluating whether the economic consequences of addressing the issue outweigh the long-term ethical responsibilities the company has toward environmental protection, future generations, and public health.

Example 3: Social Work - Confidentiality vs. Protection

- **Scenario:** A social worker is working with a family where the parents are struggling with addiction. The ethical dilemma arises when the social worker learns that the parents are neglecting their children, but the children do not want to report the issue due to fear of retaliation. The social worker must choose whether to break confidentiality in order to protect the children's well-being or to respect the family's privacy.
- **Considerations:** The social worker must decide whether to intervene and risk the family's trust or whether maintaining confidentiality could result in harm to the children. Ethical issues surrounding autonomy, confidentiality, and the duty to protect must be weighed carefully, especially in terms of the long-term consequences for the children's welfare.

Example 4: Medical Ethics - Autonomy vs. Best Interests

- **Scenario:** A doctor is treating an elderly patient who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. The patient refuses all forms of life-sustaining treatment, despite the fact that it could prolong their life. The ethical dilemma arises between respecting the patient's wishes and the doctor's professional duty to provide care that is in the patient's best interests.
- **Considerations:** The doctor must navigate the conflict between the patient's autonomy (the right to make their own medical decisions) and the ethical principle of beneficence (acting in the patient's best interest). The doctor also needs to consider cultural humility, respecting the patient's values and beliefs while ensuring the patient is fully informed about their options.

Example 5: Law Enforcement - Loyalty vs. Justice

- **Scenario:** A police officer discovers that a colleague is engaged in corrupt behavior such as accepting bribes from criminals. The officer faces an ethical dilemma between

loyalty to a fellow officer and the ethical responsibility to report the misconduct. The officer must decide whether to blow the whistle and potentially face repercussions from colleagues or stay silent to maintain solidarity within the department.

- **Considerations:** The officer must consider the impact of their decision on justice, integrity, and accountability within law enforcement. The dilemma revolves around how to balance professional loyalty with the ethical obligation to protect the public from corruption. The decision involves determining the best course of action for ensuring legal compliance and maintaining trust in the justice system.

Example 6: Education - Teacher's Duty to Report

- **Scenario:** A teacher discovers that a student is being physically abused at home but is reluctant to report the situation due to concerns over the student's family dynamics and potential retaliation. The teacher is faced with an ethical dilemma regarding whether to respect the student's confidentiality or to intervene by reporting the abuse, which might lead to family disruption.
- **Considerations:** The teacher must weigh the ethical dilemma of confidentiality versus protection. While the teacher has an ethical duty to respect the student's privacy, they also have an obligation to act in the best interests of the student and prevent harm. The teacher must follow ethical guidelines and consider how their decision-making impacts both the student's future and the family.

Example 7: Business Ethics - Profit vs. Employee Welfare

- **Scenario:** A business manager is tasked with deciding whether to cut costs by laying off workers or continuing to operate with higher overhead. The ethical dilemma involves choosing between the economic health of the business (maintaining profits) and the well-being of employees (maintaining jobs and job security).

- **Considerations:** The manager must consider the ethical responsibility to both the company's financial health and the workers' livelihoods. The dilemma requires evaluating ethical principles like fairness and justice, as well as the long-term impact of the decision on the workforce. Additionally, the manager must navigate business ethics and human resource management to find the best course of action that minimizes harm.

Example 8: Ethical Dilemmas in Nursing - End-of-Life Care

- **Scenario:** A nurse is caring for a patient at the end of life who has been refusing medication that would help manage their pain. The patient has strong cultural beliefs about natural death. The nurse is faced with an ethical dilemma between respecting the patient's wishes (autonomy) and ensuring comfort through pain management (beneficence).
- **Considerations:** The nurse must navigate the balance between patient autonomy and the ethical obligation to reduce suffering. The situation requires cultural humility and open communication with the patient and family to understand their beliefs while addressing the patient's healthcare needs.

Example 9: Business Ethics - Unfair Resource Allocation

- **Scenario:** A business leader discovers that the company's profit-maximizing strategies are leading to the unfair distribution of resources among departments, with top-performing employees getting most of the resources, while others are left behind. The ethical dilemma involves deciding whether to continue the existing allocation system or restructure it to be fairer for all employees.

- **Considerations:** The leader must consider ethical principles like justice, fairness, and equality when making decisions about resource allocation. The dilemma challenges the leader to make ethical decisions that will not only maximize profit but also ensure equitable treatment for all employees and create a more just workplace.

Example 10: Ethical Dilemma in Social Work - Confidentiality vs. Protection

- **Scenario:** A social worker learns that a client is engaging in illegal activities, such as drug dealing, that could harm the client and others. The ethical dilemma arises when deciding whether to maintain confidentiality (as required by the profession) or report the criminal activity to authorities in order to protect the community.
- **Considerations:** The social worker must navigate confidentiality and client autonomy against the ethical duty to prevent harm and ensure the safety of the wider community. It requires ethical decision-making based on ethical principles and professional standards, with cultural humility guiding their approach.