



The College of Physiotherapists of Ontario presents “Understanding Ethics, Chapter 2: The **REACH** Values & Analyzing Ethical Situations.” This is the second of three chapters to assist physiotherapists with the challenges of ethical decision-making.

The first chapter introduced background information on the biomedical ethical theories on which health care providers base their ethical decisions, and touched on the various theories of ethical decision-making.

This second chapter introduces the **REACH** concept that establishes the values physiotherapists should keep in mind when approaching an ethical situation. This chapter also presents a template for approaching an ethical situation.

The third chapter will work through a variety of ethical scenarios using the **REACH** Values and the decision-making model to facilitate application into practice and enhance learning.

Key Concepts from Chapter 1

- Moral conflicts require ethical decisions
- Respect for rules + concern for consequences bring good results
- Foundational bioethical principles:
 - Autonomy
 - Beneficence
 - Non-maleficence
 - Justice
 - (Veracity)

In the first chapter, we learned that moral conflicts can create the need to make ethical decisions and adopting an approach that combines a respect for the rules with a concern for the consequences of our actions is the best way to ensure good results.

We also learned that there are some key bioethical principles that apply to all health care providers: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice.

Many bioethicists also include veracity.

In addition to these foundational bioethical principles that apply to all health care providers, each profession may have their own set of ethical values that they use to guide decision-making. In this chapter we will explore the ethical values of physiotherapists in Ontario and apply those values to a decision-making model or process that can be used time and time again to ensure that sound ethical decisions can be made in the best interests of patients.

REACH

The professional ethical values
of Ontario physiotherapists

Respect

Excellence

Autonomy and Well-being

Communication, collaboration and advocacy

Honesty and integrity

For physiotherapists in Ontario, the professional ethical values have been defined as the following:

Respect

Excellence

Autonomy and well-being

Communication, collaboration and advocacy

Honesty and integrity

Notice how these values spell out the acronym **REACH**. **REACH** is an easy way to remember the ethical values of the profession and to be able to integrate these values into the ethical decision-making process.

Most of these values can also be easily related to one of the foundational ethical principles covered in chapter one.

The **REACH** values and the foundational ethical principles form the basis for ethical decision-making. We will briefly review each of the **REACH** values.

Respect

- Physiotherapists are respectful of the differing needs of each individual and honour the patient's right to privacy, confidentiality, dignity and treatment without discrimination.
 - (Justice)

R in **REACH** is for respect.

Physiotherapists are respectful of the differing needs of each individual and honour the patient's right to privacy, confidentiality, dignity and treatment without discrimination.

Respect is closely aligned with the ethical principle of justice as it is the demonstration of basic fairness. Physiotherapists are culturally aware and sensitive to the needs of all of their patients, treating everyone fairly and with respect, regardless of race, religion, gender, age, economic status or any other factor.

Excellence

- Physiotherapists are committed to excellence in professional practice through continued development of knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes.
 - (Beneficence and Non-maleficence)

E is for excellence.

Physiotherapists are committed to excellence in professional practice through continued development of knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes.

Taking the responsibility to maintain excellence is associated with two of the foundational ethical principles reviewed in Chapter 1; beneficence and non-maleficence. The competent practitioner takes the professional responsibility to stay current with changes in practice and is therefore more likely to do only good and less likely to do harm.

Autonomy and Well-Being

- Physiotherapists are at all times guided by a concern for the patient's well-being.
 - (Beneficence)
- Patients have the right to self determination and are empowered to participate in decisions about their health-related quality of life and physical functioning.
 - (Autonomy)

A is for autonomy and well-being.

Physiotherapists are at all times guided by a concern for the patient's well-being. Patients have the right to self determination and are empowered to participate in decisions about their health-related quality of life and physical functioning.

Concern and caring are related to the ethical principle of beneficence. Physiotherapists accept the responsibility to do what is in the best interest of the patient. The patient's right to self determination and to be empowered to participate in decisions regarding his or her health care is an expression of the ethical principle of autonomy.

Communication, Collaboration and Advocacy

- Physiotherapists value the contribution of all individuals involved in the care of a patient. Communication, collaboration and advocacy are essential to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The **C** in **REACH** stands for communication, collaboration and advocacy.

Physiotherapists value the contribution of all individuals involved in the care of a patient.

Communication, collaboration and advocacy are essential to achieve the best possible outcomes.

This value does not have a specific principle associated with it, but rather represents the respect for colleagues, other health care professionals, caregivers, families, as well as for the patient - a concept that is imbedded in all the principles. The importance of the physiotherapist's role to ensure communication, facilitate collaboration and to act as a patient advocate is also imbedded in this value.

Honesty and Integrity

- Each physiotherapist's commitment to act with honesty and integrity is fundamental to the delivery of high quality, safe and professional services.
 - (Veracity)

H in **REACH** is for honesty and integrity.

Each physiotherapist's commitment to act with honesty and integrity is fundamental to the delivery of high quality, safe and professional services.

Honesty and integrity are essential elements of the ethical principle of veracity. Patients have the right to expect that their physiotherapist will exhibit all aspects of honesty and integrity. Patients can always expect that services will be delivered in a professional manner.

Take a Moment

Match the example on the left with the value on the right:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 3 | The PT's primary concern is the patient's needs. | 1. Respect |
| 1 | The PT does not discriminate against the patients in his/her care. | 2. Excellence |
| 5 | The PT is truthful and honest in his/her interactions with patients. | 3. Autonomy & Well-Being |
| 2 | The PT makes every effort not to harm the patient with his/her actions. | 4. Communication, Collaboration & Advocacy |
| 4 | The PT works with other health care providers to ensure the best patient outcomes. | 5. Honesty and Integrity |

Clear

Submit



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Take a moment to consider the following examples. Match the statement on the left with the **REACH** value on the right that best represents the statement.

To answer, click a statement on the left, then drag and release it over the matching statement on the right.

Click "Submit" to see your results.

Answers to previous quiz

3. **Autonomy** -The PT must always place the needs of the patient above all else. The patient can reasonably expect that the PT will have their well-being in mind and will support their desire to be autonomous.
1. **Respect** - PTs demonstrate basic respect for patients and do not discriminate based on social, religious, economic, or any other area of diversity.
5. **Honesty and Integrity** - The patient can expect that the PT is honest and trustworthy and will be truthful about the patient's condition and what their treatment options are.
2. **Excellence** - The PT takes the responsibility to do what is right for the patient and at the very least will not harm the patient.
4. **Communication, collaboration, advocacy** - To ensure the best care for patients, PTs do not work alone. They work with other health care providers, patients, families and significant others to ensure the best results.

Detailed answers for Take a Moment Quiz #1

Ethical Decision-Making

- Keeping the **REACH** values in mind, each physiotherapist must adopt a decision-making process that is comfortable for them.
- Research has demonstrated that ethical decision-making can be learned, or at least confirmed for the professional.

Using the **REACH** values and adopting a standardized decision-making process, physiotherapists can enhance their ability to make sound ethical decisions in the best interests of their patients.

Using an ethical decision-making process may be a new experience for many physiotherapists. Unlike personal ethical decisions, professional ethical decisions require that PTs also consider the vulnerability of the patient and the needs of the family or significant others.

Fortunately, the ethical decision-making process can be learned and can even become part of the clinical decision-making process.

Justifying an Ethical Decision

- The conclusion of ethical decision-making is unique to the individual but the line of reasoning will adhere to certain standards
- Although there may not be complete agreement on one unique line of action, fair minded people familiar with the facts agree
 - Some positions are defensible.
 - Other positions are less defensible.
 - Defensibility cannot be completely individual.

Using a standard process to make an ethical decision is an important part of being able to justify that decision, if necessary. Remember, that although the process that is followed can be the same in every instance, the decision or outcome can vary. It is not expected that there will be complete agreement between the people involved in making an ethical decision. Every proposed action will have both those who are in favour and those who are opposed to the decision.

To determine an equitable, ethical position, one must consider whether a group of people, with a similar background (i.e. physiotherapists), would come to a similar conclusion. The degree to which a position is defensible increases the strength of that decision.

Decision-Making Models

- There are a variety of models for ethical decision-making
- Adopt that which is comfortable and meets your professional needs
- Not all aspects will apply at all times

There are a variety of very acceptable processes or models for ethical decision-making.

Individuals should adopt a model that is most comfortable for them and meets their professional needs. Remember that not all aspects or steps of the process will apply at all times.

We will now present one model of ethical decision-making.

Steps to Analyzing an Ethical Situation

1. **Recognize** that there is an ethical issue
2. **Identify** the problem and who is involved
3. Consider the relevant **facts**, laws, principles and values
4. Establish and analyze the potential **options**
5. Choose a course of **action** and implement it
6. **Evaluate** the outcome and determine further action if needed

Regardless of the decision-making methodology one selects, there are certain steps that are universally accepted as being part of the decision-making process.

- First - Recognize that there is an ethical issue
- Second - Identify the problem and the persons involved
- Third - Consider the relevant facts, laws, principles and values that may be involved
- Next - Establish and analyze the potential options
- Then - Choose a course of action and implement it
- And finally - Evaluate the outcome and determine if further action is needed.

The information that is gathered and analyzed need not necessarily follow this order, but all of the information helps to make the decision-making process easier.

We will go through the steps using the order on the screen.

1. Recognize that there is an ethical issue. i.e. something is making you uncomfortable

- Can you identify the ethical principle(s) involved?
- Are any of the **REACH** values compromised?
- Are there values or principles in conflict?
- Is this a *problem*, a *distress* or a *dilemma*?

The first thing to do is recognize that there is an ethical issue. In other words, something is making you uncomfortable. Part of what helps to define an ethical issue is the identification of the ethical principles involved. Ask yourself the following questions:

Which of the **REACH** values may be compromised?

Is there more than one ethical principle involved or more than one **REACH** value involved?

Are there two or more values or principles that are in conflict?

Can you determine if this is an ethical problem, ethical distress or an ethical dilemma? We will briefly review what these terms mean as the types of issues will demand different actions on your part.

Ethical Problem

- Presents challenges or threats to moral duties and values
- Causes need for reflection prior to implementing a course of action

An ethical problem presents challenges or threats to your moral duties and values and causes a need for reflection to determine the best course of action. In this case, not only do you become aware of an ethical issue because it is making you uncomfortable, but you are able to recognize what the problem is and also have the ability to manage and resolve it.

Ethical Distress

- You know the course of action to take, but there is a structural barrier in the way of doing what you know is right
- Psychological discomfort you feel when you are blocked from being the kind of person you want to be or from doing what is right

Ethical distress it is more complicated because you recognize the problem and determine a course of action but there is something that is in the way of you taking the action you know you should be taking. You are blocked by something either internal to your own makeup or external and imposed on you that keeps you from making the decision you know you should be making.

Ethical distress is the discomfort you feel when you are prevented from being the person you want to be or from doing what is right.

Two Types of Barriers Causing Ethical Distress

- Type A
 - You can identify the barrier that keeps you from doing what you know is right
 - Institutional
 - Financial
- Type B
 - Something is wrong but you are not sure what it is

There are two types of barriers that may prevent you from following the right course of action. It is important to determine which type of barrier it is. With a type A barrier you are blocked from doing what is right by an external force such as an institutional policy or a financial reason. A type B barrier on the other hand, is not always obvious. You know something is in your way, but you cannot identify the source.

Ethical Dilemma

- Common type of problem that involves two (or more) morally correct courses of action that cannot both be followed
- i.e. you are doing something right...and wrong at the same time
 - Between a rock and a hard place
 - Taking one right course will negate the other right course

The third type of issue is called an ethical dilemma. An ethical dilemma exists when there are two morally correct courses of action but they conflict with one another and cannot both be followed. It is not uncommon for physiotherapists to be faced with an ethical dilemma and to feel like they are between a rock and a hard place. For example, a patient refuses a therapeutic intervention that the physiotherapist thinks would be very beneficial. The physiotherapist is exhibiting beneficence, wanting to help the patient and provide the care they believe the patient needs. On the other hand, the patient is exhibiting his or her autonomy in wanting to make an independent decision. If the patient is forced to accept the intervention, the physiotherapist's need to do the right thing for the patient is met but the patient's right to autonomy is negated. The physiotherapist would be doing something right and wrong at the same time.

Take a Moment

click on the best response to the following scenario

1. You become aware that your colleague is billing for services he/she is not actually providing.

Is this?...

- A) an Ethical Problem
- B) Ethical Distress
- C) an Ethical Dilemma

Correct:
This is an ethical problem. You know what is being done is unethical (and illegal). You can take action to resolve the issue.

Submit

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Take a moment to reflect on the following scenario and click on the best response.

You become aware that your colleague is billing for services he or she is not actually providing.

Consider whether this is this an example of:

- A - an Ethical Problem,
- B - Ethical Distress, or
- C - an Ethical Dilemma

Click "Submit" to proceed.

Take a Moment

click on the best response to the following scenario

2. When you speak with this same colleague, he/she tells you the boss told him/her to do it and that he/she would be fired if he/she did not.

Is this?...

- A) an Ethical Problem
- B) Ethical Distress
- C) an Ethical Dilemma

Correct:
Ethical Distress (Type A).
In this example, you realize that taking action will require the PT to take on the employer and may have negative consequences, presenting a Type A barrier.

Submit

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When you speak with the same colleague, he tells you that the boss told him to do it and he would be fired if he did not.

Is this an example of:

- A. an Ethical Problem
- B. Ethical Distress
- C. an Ethical Dilemma

Please click on the best response, then click "Submit" to proceed.

Take a Moment

click on the best response to the following scenario

3. Your colleague tells you he/she will stop the billing practice but only if you are sworn to secrecy.

Is this?...

- A) an Ethical Problem
- B) Ethical Distress
- C) an Ethical Dilemma

Correct:

This is an ethical dilemma: The principle of autonomy is conflicting with the principle of honesty. You want to do what is right and you hope that your colleague will voluntarily stop the activity but his/her autonomy and your honesty or veracity are in conflict.

Submit

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And finally, your colleague tells you he/she will stop the billing practice but only if you are sworn to secrecy.

Is this an example of?...

- A - an Ethical Problem,
- B - Ethical Distress
- C - an Ethical Dilemma

Again, click on the best response, then click "Submit" to proceed.

2. Identify the problem and who is involved

- Very important to accurately define the problem and identify the interested parties
 - Why is there concern about the situation?
 - What makes you feel uncomfortable?
 - Who else is involved? (other staff, patients, family/friends, employer, payer or others)

The next important step in ethical decision-making is to correctly define the problem and determine who else may be involved in the situation.

Consider why there is a concern about the situation, what is making you uncomfortable and who else may be involved. If the problem and players are not identified correctly, it can be difficult to determine the best course of action.

The interested parties can be as few as two (you and the patient, or you and a colleague for example), but generally, the interested parties will include various others that can be involved either directly, or indirectly.

Involving all the appropriate people is very important to the decision-making process.

3. Consider the relevant facts including the REACH value or ethical principle involved

- Respect (Justice)
- Excellence (Beneficence or Non-maleficence)
- Autonomy and well-being
- Communication, collaboration and advocacy
- Honesty and Integrity (Veracity)

Step three of the decision-making process requires the identification of the relevant facts, laws, principles and values to provide clarity to the decision-making process.

Understanding the values that are involved and determining whether they are in agreement or are in fact, in conflict is an important step.

Consideration and review of any applicable laws, standards, policies or other rules should also be done to develop an full understanding of the issue at hand.

4. Establish and analyze options

- Determine the potential options for action
- Use your moral imagination
- Negotiate... Is there a “third way”?
- Is the course of action consistent with:
 - The foundational ethical principles
 - The REACH values
 - The relevant laws, regulations and standards

All of the work done in previous steps to define the issue and the persons involved aids in determining potential options or courses of action. You are encouraged to be creative to use a variety of resources to determine your course of action.

Before implementing a course of action, check it against the following tests.

- What would others do in a similar situation? You may want to consult with others and gain their advice.
- Can I defend my decision? If you can satisfactorily explain your decision to another person, you gain some satisfaction that you are doing the right thing
- Are there any other options that exist? What other possible action could be considered?

5. Make and implement the decision

- Weigh all possibilities against outcomes
- What are the barriers to implementation?
- Make the decision
- Implement the decision
- Consider any collateral damages

When making a decision, it is important to consider what may occur if you do take action. You may determine a course of action, but then realize that taking action will require significant moral courage on your part to actually implement the course of action you have decided upon. Moral courage may actually be one of your biggest barriers as the collateral damages that may occur may have a negative impact on you.

Once you have weighed all possible actions against potential outcomes and considered the barriers to implementation, you can make a decision on what action to take and implement that decision.

6. Evaluate the outcome and the need for follow up

- Is further action required?
- Do organizational structures or policies require revision?
- What did you learn from the process?

After you have taken action you are not quite finished yet. You need to re-evaluate the situation and determine if the situation is resolved. Consider whether similar situations will be less likely to occur and if any further action needs to be taken.

Should another party be made aware of the situation and resolution?

Are there organizational changes that need to be made?

What did you learn from the process and how can you share your learning with others?

In Summary

- Use a stepwise approach to decision-making
 - Identify the problem and who is involved
 - Consider the facts
 - Determine possible courses of action
 - Implement the solution
 - Evaluate and follow up
- Use the **REACH** values to assist

To summarize, when you become aware of an ethical problem, following a stepwise decision-making model can ensure consistency, soundness and the ability to justify your decisions.

The ethical decision-making model you choose to use is a personal preference. We have provided one option that contains the following important characteristics:

- Identify the problem and who is involved
- Consider the facts, the laws, the values and principles involved
- Determine possible courses of action
- Implement a solution and
- Evaluate the outcomes to determine if further action is needed

The ethical values of physiotherapists in Ontario or REACH values can assist in identifying the problem, the players, and the potential solutions as well as to evaluate the outcomes.

Applying an ethical decision-making model.

- The final chapter in this series will provide several case examples where you can apply this ethical decision-making model

The next chapter of this ethics module will apply the decision-making model and the **REACH** values using a case-based or scenario approach.

Select References and Resources

(complete list available on request)

Legislation

- [The Physiotherapy Act, 1991](#)
- [Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004](#)

Regulations

- [Professional Misconduct](#)

Standards for Professional Practice

- [Clinical Education](#)
- [Conflict of Interest](#)
- [Managing Challenging Relationships](#)

Content for this module was written and developed by Dr Nancy Kirsch

Congratulations on completing this chapter of the understanding ethics online learning module.

Select references and resources for this chapter are on the screen. A complete list of references is available upon request.

The College of Physiotherapists of Ontario would like to extend our most sincere thanks and gratitude to Dr. Nancy Kirsch for the development of the content for this module.

Was this chapter helpful?

We would appreciate your feedback.

Please use this link to complete a short online survey.

[\(click here to go to the survey\)](#)

Thank you

We are very interested to hear your feedback on this chapter of the Ethics Learning Module.

Please use the link on the screen to complete a very short online survey.

Thank you.