Chapter 5
Ethics

Learning Objectives
- Define ethics, morals, unethical, medical ethics
- Distinguish ethical from moral decisions
- Identify premise that should underlie paramedic's ethical decision in prehospital care
- Discuss ethical dilemmas paramedics typically encounter in field

Learning Objectives (Cont'd)
- Analyze relation between law, ethics in EMS
- Discuss rights of patients
- Compare criteria used in allocating scarce EMS resources
Learning Objectives (Cont'd)

- Identify issues surrounding use of advance directives in making prehospital resuscitation decision
- Discuss basic virtues most essential in EMS professionals

Introduction

- People trust paramedics
- Mandates adherence to set of rules & values

Ethics

- Ethics
  - Societal principles of conduct
- Morals
  - Values that help define right from wrong
- Unethical behavior
  - Conduct not conforming to approved standards of societal, professional behaviors
Ethics (Cont'd)

- **Morals**
  - Values, social standards/customs

- **Medical ethics**
  - Basic principles
    - *Primum non nocere*
    - Beneficence
    - Autonomy
    - Justice

Ethics (Cont’d)

- **Truthfulness & honesty**
  - Truth about illness, injury, medical treatment

- **Medical ethics differ from law**

The Nature of EMS Professionals

- **Patients trust paramedics**
  - Need to respect this trust always
  - Integrity

- **Patient well-being relies on more than just medical care**
  - Financial status
  - Freedom from fear
  - Comfort
  - Spiritual peace
Common Dilemmas for Paramedics

- Make patient feel needs met
- Patient’s wishes may conflict with paramedic scope of authority
- Patient’s wishes conflict with family wishes

Common Dilemmas for Paramedics (Cont’d)

- Patients have right to live & die
- Patients make medical decisions based on ability to pay

Codes of Ethics

- Historical
  - Guide for interactions between health care profession & public
  - Hammurabi in Mesopotamia, 1700 BC
  - Hippocrates in Athens, 400 BC
  - Aulus Celsus in Rome, AD 2
Codes of Ethics (Cont’d)

- Modern
  - EMT Code of Ethics
  - Nurses Code of Ethics
  - American Medical Association Code of Ethics
  - Code of Ethics for Emergency Physicians

Responsibilities of EMS Professionals

- Primum non nocere
  - Latin for “first do no harm”

Patient Bill of Rights

- Created in 1997
  - Information disclosure
  - Choice of provider, plan
  - Access to emergency services
  - Participation in treatment decisions
  - Respect & nondiscrimination
  - Confidentiality of health information
  - Complaints & appeals
Professional Accountability

- Conflict can exist
  - Organizations
  - Peers
  - Students
  - Legal
  - Moral

Professional Accountability (Cont’d)

- Accountability to self
  - Stay certified
  - Stay educated
  - Read
  - Look, act part

Basic Virtues

- Courage
  - Stand for what is right
- Honor (integrity)
  - Telling the truth
- Humility
  - Be humble
- Kindness
  - Caring and consideration
- Respect
  - Key to good patient care
The Best Test

- Can you say to patient, "I did my very best for you"?

Chapter Summary

- Ethics are societal principles of conduct adopted as guidelines for personal behavior
- Morals are values that help define right versus wrong, derived from teachings from parents, grandparents, mentors, religious beliefs

Chapter Summary (Cont'd)

- Unethical conduct does not conform to approved standards of social, professional behavior
- Patient privacy protection is paramount
- Honesty, respect for humanity essential traits of paramedic
Chapter Summary (Cont’d)

- Medical codes of ethics throughout history, modern times focus on first doing no harm, responsibilities of health care professional to patient
- Patients’ rights based on intrinsic autonomy, dignity

Chapter Summary (Cont’d)

- Professional accountability includes staying current with certificates, maintaining health relationship with oneself & colleagues while always placing patient’s best interest foremost
- Basic virtues exemplify basis of ethical behavior, evident in how paramedics treat each other, patients

Questions?