



# **CGMH Ethical Decision Making Framework: SBAR**

(Toolkit Information and Worksheets)

## Introduction

Ethical decision-making is the process of making “good” or sometimes the “least bad” choice in ethically challenging situations. Ethical decision-making is a reason-giving and a reason seeking process. We should be able to know and explain why we do what we do. Ethics promotes reflective practice in the delivery of health care when there is no clear and obvious right course or action. Our ethics decision-making framework and tools help us address the question “What should we do and why?” It supports us in working through a deliberative process to answer an ethical question, including who should be involved, with both internal and external stakeholders, what information is relevant, what values and principles and legislation should be considered, and finally who has to take action and how should the decision be communicated.

Ethical issues arise every day in health care and may be experienced by any member of the health care team. They may be related directly to patient care or indirectly to decisions made to support patient care. From the bedside, and from the loading dock, to the boardroom, everyone at Collingwood General and Marine Hospital (CGMH) has a role to play in ensuring ethical delivery of care, ethical principles and values are incorporated into the way that decisions are made and work is done and care is delivered every day.

As a healthcare organization we face difficult decisions and seek to provide quality care within ongoing financial constraints. There are competing goals and values, and unlimited demands on limited resources. Using a fair, transparent, and ethical process may be the best way to arrive at decisions that are publicly accountable.

The CGMH Ethics SBAR<sup>1</sup> provides a step-by-step process to help guide any member of the CGMH community in working through ethical issues encountered in healthcare. The CGMH toolkit identifies the resources available to guide decision-making and actions about ethical issues that arise, whether clinical or organizational. It is intended to help individuals, or teams work through an ethical issue; to assist clinicians in decisions about individual patient care, and to support teams working together through a systematic process. The CGMH Ethics SBAR facilitates effective communication, develops a shared language and builds a common understanding of how to approach ethical issues.

Some ethical decisions may be predominantly clinical in nature; others will be largely organizationally focused, a number of ethical decisions will have both clinical and organizational aspects. Clinical ethical decisions are typically those that involve and impact specific patients or staff members and involve individual values, particularly patient values, (e.g. should this treatment be offered? Should it be recommended that a treatment be discontinued?) Organizational ethical decisions are generally those that involve and impact groups of patients or staff members, units, systems, or the organization as a whole and centre on the values of the organization

## Using SBAR

(Quick Reference Guide with longer version to follow)

### 1. Situation

**Problem - Tell the story.**

What are the facts?

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<sup>1</sup> SBAR is a communication technique commonly used in healthcare. It follows a predictable pattern. Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation.

## CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

What exactly is the problem to be solved?  
Who has the authority to make the decision?  
Who needs to be involved?

### 2. Background

Who should be involved?  
Have I considered other perspectives?  
What values or principles are in conflict?  
How do CGMH Mission, Vision and Values fit?  
Is there relevant organizational or professional policy?  
Is there relevant law?  
What is my personal context/bias?

### 3. Assessments

#### **Options**

What are the options?  
Are there compromises available?  
What about doing nothing?

#### **Deliberate/Evaluate**

What are the consequences of each of the options?  
How are the options related to identified values or principles?  
What are the risks and benefits of the options?

### 4. Recommendation

#### **Decide**

State the decision  
[Apply the TV Test \(decision-check\)](#)

#### **Act**

What is the implementation plan?  
Who has to take action?  
What is the communication strategy?

How do we evaluate/revise the action plan as needed?

## Step by Step Guidelines

The CGMH Ethics SBAR decision making framework includes fundamental steps in ethical decision making and incorporates it into the SBAR format (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendations). For each step a set of questions is provided to assist members of the healthcare team work through the ethical decision making process. Some questions may be more relevant to clinical decisions, others to organizational decisions.

## CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

The following questions may help you recognize that using the CGMH Ethics SBAR may assist you to come to a decision.

- Are there several possible courses of action?
- Are conflicting values highlighting differences in opinion on the best course of action?
- Are you unable to carry out what you believe is the right course of action?
- Are you concerned about a perceived unethical action being proposed?

### Step 1: Situation

The purpose of this step is to come to an understanding of what exactly is the problem to be solved. Asking the following questions will assist in coming to that understanding.

What is it about this situation now that is triggering ethical consideration?

What are the facts, include subjective data (perspective) and objective data (measurable)?

What, exactly, is the ethical problem that needs to be solved?

Who is the decision maker in this situation?

### Step 2: Background

In this step the problem identified in Step 1 is put into context. It is important to identify who should be involved in the problem and collaboratively consider relevant national and provincial law; organizational mission, vision and values which help guide the work completed at CGMH. Professional values are also important to consider and it is helpful to think critically about one's own perspective, "biases" or stake in the situation.

Is there relevant law? Stop and consider this thoroughly.

Some ethical principles are fundamental to healthcare ([Appendix 1](#)).

Acknowledge the power differentials among the participants in your process and create an open, collaborative environment where all perspectives can be considered. Empowerment is fundamental to fairness.

### Step 3: Assessment

In this step we develop options on how to proceed and deliberate and evaluate the risks and benefits, the advantages and disadvantages and the consequences of each of the options. (This is easy to say – but sometimes hard to do.) When we talk of ethical decision-making we have to resort to metaphors: "weighing options," "balancing competing values" "trading-off interests" and so on. Relate the options to the values or ethical principles that support (or do not support) them. Be prepared to say "We should (should not) do this because..."

What about doing nothing? Remember to consider compromises to identified options.

## CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

Writing the options down may help to focus the discussion and come to a decision.

### Step 4: Recommendation

In this step the recommended course of action is confirmed and the implementation plan is developed. Who needs to act, when and how? What is the communication plan?

At times the decision may feel like the “least wrong” decision, therefore apply the “**TV test**”. The **TV test** is, in effect, a publicity test. Could I step out of the meeting room and identify and explain our chosen course of action to the local media? Could I expect the public reaction to be “wow, that must have been a really difficult decision to make but I can see why they did it...”

It is important to recognize that the decision made is the best decision that could be made given the knowledge and information at the time the decision was made. If new information becomes available the decision may need to be revised. Applying the TV test will help to determine if the decision should be re-visited.

## Using CGMH Ethical Framework SBAR Worksheets

Each step in the Ethics SBAR includes guiding questions to consider in the decision making process.

For each step, consider the scope of your role and level of expertise and whether you should involve other resources (e.g., ethicist, manager, patient/family advisory council, administrator) to support, facilitate, or further inform the decision-making process.

Keep the whole toolkit handy as you work through the process, some of the information in descriptions of the steps may be helpful as you consider the questions on the worksheets. The steps are not always linear or sequential. You may go back and forth between the steps a few times as you consider information and perspectives.

Use the worksheets during the decision making process. The act of recording will assist the reflective process, coming to a decision and continuing through to action. When you come to a point where you have worked through the problem and feel you can own the decision, it is time to act.

If that doesn't happen and you need help, consult with others on your team and determine if there is anyone who can assist and consider contacting your Manager/designate.

## Organizational Reflection

Accreditation Canada encourages reviewing ethical dilemmas we encounter. It helps to understand what dilemmas staff, physicians, and volunteers encounter in the workplace and will inform policy development and practice support.

## CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

When you use the CGMH Ethics SBAR process, please send the completed worksheet via email to [ethics@cgmh.on.ca](mailto:ethics@cgmh.on.ca) for reporting and review by the Ethics Committee.

There are a number of resources that you may want to consider when you are working through your ethical dilemma. **Click on the titles below to access some additional resources.**

[Approval & Signing Authority](#)

[Code of Conduct](#)

[Conflict of Interest](#)

### Consent

- [For Treatment](#)
- [For Blood Transfusion](#)
- [For Obstetrics](#)
- [For Photo Release](#)
- [For Release of Information](#)

[Legal Requirements](#)

[Medical Aid in Dying](#)

[Mission, Vision, Values](#)

[Occupational Health and Safety](#)

[Patient Declaration of Values](#)

### Personal Health Information

- <http://www.cgmh.on.ca/patients-visitors-details/privacy-health-information>
- [http://thepulse/intranet/apps/detail\\_view.cfm?MenuID=2000052&ID=146&CategoryID=2](http://thepulse/intranet/apps/detail_view.cfm?MenuID=2000052&ID=146&CategoryID=2)
- [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/legislation/priv\\_legislation/personal\\_info.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/legislation/priv_legislation/personal_info.aspx)

### Privacy/Confidentiality

- [Confidentiality Form](#)
- [Human Resources Privacy](#)
- [No Photography/Video](#)
- [Information Practices](#)
- [Social Media](#)
- [Whistleblower](#)

### Repatriation

- NSM LHIN Repatriation Agreement ([link to be inserted once final approval received](#))
- [Life and Limb](#)
- [NSM LHIN Outbreak Repatriation Guidance](#)

[Workplace Relations and Violence Prevention](#)

# CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

## CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

### CGMH Ethics SBAR Worksheet

#### Step 1 Situation

The purpose of this step is to come to an understanding of what exactly is the problem to be solved, and who has the authority to act to implement a solution. Asking the following questions will assist in coming to that understanding.

***Tell the story.***

***What are the facts? (include both subjective and objective data)***

***Why do we need to make a decision now?***

***Who needs to be involved in the decision- making?***

***What exactly is the ethical problem we have to solve?***

***Who has the authority to make the decision?***

***Who owns the problem?***

CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

CGMH Ethics SBAR Worksheet

In this step the problem identified in Step 1 is put into context.

**Step 2 – BACKGROUND**

***What exactly is the problem from Step 1: Situation  
Make sure we “own” the problem.***

***Who are the stakeholders?  
What legitimate interests do they have in this situation?***

***Is there relevant law?  
Does it dictate what should be done in this situation? If yes, do you need you continue or  
is the course now clear?***

***Is there relevant organizational policy? If yes, what guidance does it provide?***

***Is there relevant professional ethical policy? If yes, what guidance does it provide?***

***What is my personal context and/or bias?  
Do I need to set aside my own feelings?***

## CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

*What values or ethical principles are engaged in this conflict?*  
(see [Appendix 1](#))

CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

[CGMH Ethics SBAR Worksheet](#)

[Step 3 - Assessment](#)

Ask first - Is doing nothing an option?

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Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<i>Benefits /Strengths</i>	<i>Benefits /Strengths</i>	<i>Benefits /Strengths</i>
<i>Harms/ Limitations/Consequences</i>	<i>Harms /Limitations / Consequences</i>	<i>Harms/Limitations/Consequences</i>

CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

<i>Aligned with what Values/Principles/Policies</i>	<i>Aligned with what Values/Principles/Policies</i>	<i>Aligned with what Values/Principles/Policies</i>
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**What is the selected option?**

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**CGMH Ethics SBAR Worksheet**

**Step 4 Recommendations**

<i>What is the decision?</i>
<i>Does the decision pass the TV test?</i>  Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>What is the implementation plan?</i>
<i>Who has to take action?</i>
<i>What is the Communication Plan?</i>
<i>How do we evaluate/revise the action plan if required?</i>

**Please email completed SBAR Worksheet to [ethics@cgmh.on.ca](mailto:ethics@cgmh.on.ca)**

### APPENDIX 1

#### Ethical Principles in Healthcare

Delivery of health services is a continual process of balancing values, principles and interests in the allocation and delivery of health services. Commonly, principles or values come into conflict and must be reflected upon to help you decide how to proceed. Below are some of the important ethical principles and concepts that are prevalent in health care service delivery:

**Autonomy:** the right to self-determination, independence and freedom. Involves the provider's willingness to provide information to the client so that they may make informed decisions and subsequently respect a client's right to choose what is right for himself, even if the provider does not agree with the client's decision. Valid Consent is an example of how this principle is applied.

**Beneficence:** to "do good". Requires providers perform acts that will benefit clients. Good care requires that the provider understands the client from a holistic perspective that respects the client's beliefs, feelings, wishes and values, as well as those of the client's family or significant others. Beneficence involves acting in ways that demonstrate caring, listening, and supporting.

**Non-Maleficence:** protection from harm. This requires that providers do not harm their client, even if they cannot protect themselves. Hazards in the workplace may put the client at risk. Staff are expected to identify such risks and act to prevent harm.

**Justice:** the obligation to be fair to all people, regardless of their race, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, medical diagnosis, social standing, economic level, or religious beliefs. The principle of justice can further be expanded to include distributive justice such as equal access for and fair allocation of resources and procedural justice, or shared decision-making; including people in the decisions that affect them.

**Confidentiality:** the obligation to keep patient information confidential. Professional standards and privacy legislation provide guidance on the conditions under which health information can be ethically and legally disclosed.

**Sanctity of life:** the principle that every life is of equal and infinite value. In its utmost form (vitalism), this principle would be upheld at all costs, no matter what is quality. A more moderate interpretation of this principle is that life has instrumental value (to carry out a purpose).

**Quality of life:** the principle that mere biological existence does not in itself have value; rather that life gives rise to activities and experiences which provide pleasure, satisfaction and well-being. The person whose life is in question is the only reliable judge of that life's quality.

## CGMH Ethical Decision-making Framework

**Paternalism:** the practice of controlling, monitoring or deciding what is good for an individual rather than letting him choose for himself. This includes restricting someone's freedom to act to prevent him from harming himself (eg. restraints, suicide prevention) and restricting someone's autonomy. Paternalism is rarely justifiable with a mentally competent adult client.

### Acknowledgements

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**Resources from the following organizations were reviewed and considered by members of the CGMH Ethics Task Force in the creation of the CGMH Ethics SBAR.**

Niagara Health System, Ontario

Hamilton Health Sciences Centre, Hamilton,

Ontario

Health Sciences North, Sudbury, Ontario