



ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

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Home Health Case Study

Mrs. Smith is an 80-year-old single woman with no known relatives. She lives alone in a small apartment in a dangerous neighborhood. She is insulin-dependent, increasingly confused, has worsening eyesight, and is experiencing urinary incontinence. Due to concerns about their own safety and the conditions in which Mrs. Smith must live, two home care attendants have already refused to continue assignments to her. She needs 24-hour supervision. Medicaid may not certify this level of care. The agency staff responsible for her are pressing her to enter a nursing home. Mrs. Smith insists that she would rather die at home without care than enter a nursing home.

This case can be considered from the perspectives of individual ethics, institutional ethics and societal ethics. Please answer the following questions in these areas using this scale:

- 1 strongly agree 2 agree 3 not sure 4 disagree 5 strongly disagree

Individual Ethics

- Mrs. Smith has a right to remain in her home.
 1 2 3 4 5
- Mrs. Smith has a right to receive decent care in her home.
 1 2 3 4 5
- Mrs. Smith must face the realistic limits of her situation.
 1 2 3 4 5
- Home care professionals have a right to refuse to care for Mrs. Smith.
 1 2 3 4 5
- It seems that Mrs. Smith needs others to make her healthcare decisions.
 1 2 3 4 5

Institutional Ethics

- The agency should use every means to convince her to move.
 1 2 3 4 5
- The agency should find a way to care for her in her home.
 1 2 3 4 5
- The agency should face the fact: it can't solve everybody's problem.
 1 2 3 4 5
- The agency should provide insufficient care rather than no care at all.
 1 2 3 4 5
- If the staff needs to bend the truth to get \$ for care, that is acceptable.
 1 2 3 4 5

Societal Ethics

- Spending great sums of money for curative medicine while underfunding home care is a serious injustice.
 1 2 3 4 5
- To finance home care we should take funds from acute care.
 1 2 3 4 5
- We can fund home care without cutting other health services.
 1 2 3 4 5
- Health administrative costs (20-25% of current spending) should be severely cut to fund home care.
 1 2 3 4 5
- Changing home care funding would hardly help a case like this.
 1 2 3 4 5

An essential first step in dealing with ethical issues is to determine on which level we are working. Then we can decide *who* and *what ethical tools* are needed to address adequately the question on that level. The people and tools suited to one level are not always appropriate for other levels.



**OPINIONS AND FEELINGS ARE FREQUENTLY A PERSONAL TRIUMPH OVER GOOD THINKING
YOU DEFINE REALITY BY WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHAT YOU DO ABOUT IT.**