

Health Care Ethics – Difficult Treatment Decisions



Betsy B. Johnson



Introduction

- What to do when a person receives a diagnosis that is a terminal condition or one that will pose difficult treatment options
- Communication
- Coordination



Diagnosis

- How was the condition diagnosed?
- Consider a second opinion to ensure accurate diagnosis and possible treatment options



Treatment Issues

- What, if any, is the typical treatment for the condition?
- Is treatment being withheld?
- If so, does this reflect the wishes of the person who is ill?



Treatment Issues

- Is the person legally competent (presumed competent if 18 years or older and never adjudicated incompetent in a court of law)
- Does individual have capacity to understand all or part of his or her diagnosis?



Informing Individual

- How do you tell a person about his or her terminal diagnosis?
- Who should tell the person?



Coordination

- Is everyone on the same page?
- Is there disagreement among any of the team or direct service support professionals?
- Are there concerns from the day service?
- Is there effective communication with the health care agent, guardian or family?
- Is overall communication effective regarding the individual's situation?



Conflict

- Is there any disagreement?
- What is the disagreement?
- Are there inaccurate assumptions?
- Are values in conflict?



Ethics Consultation

- Help define conflict
- All parties at the table
- Objective view of situation
- Help define options
- Consultation focused on the individual
- Does NOT make decisions for the parties
- Advisory role



Framework for consult

Diagnosis

Prognosis

Stakeholders

Options

Recommendations