

# Ethics Consultation



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#### Pastoral Care

Cape Canaveral Hospital  
321.868.2718

Holmes Regional Medical Center  
321.434.7183 or 321.434.7000

Palm Bay Community Hospital  
321.434.7183 or 321.434.8000

8/03

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*Together, we're better.*

## What is an ethics consultation?

An ethics “consult” is designed to help patients, their family members, and healthcare providers deal with difficult ethical issues that arise in patient care. A team of healthcare professionals experienced in dealing with ethical issues — typically a physician, administrator, patient representative, nurse, chaplain, and social worker — meet with the patient and/or appropriate family members to talk about all the different issues involved in their situation. The issues discussed and suggested approach are documented in the patient’s medical record, but the purpose of the ethics consult is not to make patient care decisions — rather, it seeks to offer support to those involved in decision making.

## Who can request a consultation?

Any member of the healthcare team — physicians, nurses, social workers, the patient, and/or significant others — can request an ethics consultation.

## Who attends an ethics consultation?

Selected Ethics Committee members meet with the patient (if possible), appropriate family members and/or significant others, and healthcare providers.

## When should an ethics consult be considered?

In cases where a patient and or family may be considering a decision involving serious ethical issues (such as withdrawing or with-

holding life-sustaining treatment, Do Not Resuscitate orders, etc.), a consultation may help ensure they understand all of the issues and facts.

An ethics consult may also be beneficial if the patient and his or her physician disagree about what treatment is best. The more serious the conflict or possible consequences, the greater the need for a consultation.

Often an ethics consult also helps identify the primary decision-maker, who should be informed of the patient’s condition, or the appropriate proxy (someone else who may need to make decisions on behalf of the patient). Of course, sometimes these decisions involve legal issues and may require additional consultation with Legal Services or Risk Management.

## What will the Ethics Committee recommend?

The committee may recommend a number of things. For example, they might recommend:

- Healthcare providers discuss the case further. (Members of the Ethics Committee would help in these discussions.)
- It may help the people involved to learn more about a particular issue (for example, Living Wills).
- The healthcare team might come up with some different options for the patient and/or family to consider.
- The healthcare team, patient, and family should talk about all aspects of a potential treatment.

## What are the benefits of an ethics consult?

An ethics consultation can help in many ways. For example, it can help:

- Discover and understand the issues
- Serve as a forum to share concerns and ask questions
- Identify possible treatment alternatives
- Provide guidance to the healthcare team, patient, and family members
- Resolve conflicts

Participants are not required to follow the recommendations of the Ethics Committee.

## How do I request a consultation?

**At Cape Canaveral Hospital** — Call the Pastoral Care office at 868-2718 (from within the hospital, you can dial extension 2-2718).

**At Holmes Regional Medical Center or Palm Bay Community Hospital** — Call the Pastoral Care office at 434-7183 (from within the hospital, you can dial extension 4-7183) Monday through Friday, from 8 am to 4:30 pm. After hours, call the hospital operator and ask to speak with the administrative supervisor (from within the hospital, you can dial “0” for the operator, or from outside call 434-7000 for HRMC or 434-8000 for PBCH.)

Ethics consults usually take place within 24 hours of the request.