

*Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific  
Research  
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## *Basic Nursing Sciences*

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# Ethical Theory

*by:*

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□ At the end of this chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Discuss the major ethical theories used in decision-making.
2. Explain the key ideas and limitations of each ethical theory.
3. Identify the ethical theory most appropriate for decision-making in health care.

## INTRADUCTION

1. Ethical theories attempt to provide a system of principles and rules for resolving ethical dilemmas

A. An ethical dilemma is a situation that requires a decision to be made between two equally unfavorable and disagreeable alternatives

B. Many healthcare decisions involve ethical dilemmas that have no clear cut answers

1. ethical theories consist of fundamental beliefs about what is morality right or wrong and propose reasons for maintaining these beliefs

2. ethical theories provide the bases for a professional code of ethics.

## DENATOLOGY

□ General information

a. Deontology is a theory of ethical decision making based on the discovery and confirmation of a set of morals or rules that govern the resolution of ethical dilemmas.

- b. Deontology attempts to determine what is right or wrong based on one's duty or obligation to act rather than on the action consequences
- c. Because it emphasizes duty or obligation to another person, deontology is the only acceptable theory for ethical decision-making in health care
- d. Immanuel Kant's, which assert that all people should be respected and treated as ends rather than as means to an end, is a primary example of deontology.

### **KAY AIDES**

- a. Deontology is based on the unchanging and absolute principles derived from universal values at the heart of the all major religions.
- b. Its based principle is to the ensure survival of the species by fulfilling one's duty or obligation to another person.
- c. Any act in accord with one's duty or obligation is right, and any act not in accord with one's duty or obligation is wrong

### **LIMITATION**

Some theorist contend that teleology advocates the maximum happiness of a few rather than the average happiness of all.

Because utility is the only principle one can use to determine whether an act is right or wrong, many conflicts go unresolved.

Questions usually arise about which is better to produce greatest amount of good or the least amount of harm for all.

Teleology tends to ignore the individual's rights and needs.

Quantifying the relative good and harm of actions, particularly in health care is usually difficult if not impossible

Determining the “greatest good” is highly subjective and can result in inconsistent decision

## EGOISM

### General information

a. Egoism is a theory of ethical decision-making that considers self-interest and self - preservation as the only proper goals of all human actions

b. Egoism is based on the innate and primitive human

tendency to be self-centered. [KAY IDEAS](#)

a. Egoism is based on the principle that the only right decision is the one that maximizes the pleasure of the decision maker.

b. Something is good and right if the individuals desires it.

c. The decision maker in an ethical dilemma makes decisions based on personal comfort.

## LIMITATION

a. Egoism does not consider moral principles or rules outside the individual’s point of view.

b. Inconsistencies arise from one decision to the next, even in similar situation.

c. Social chaos can result when individuals act solely in their own interests

d. Because it does not consider the rights of others, egoism is unacceptable for most decisions involving ethical situations in health care.

### □ General information

Obligation is a theory of ethical decision making that attempts to resolve ethical dilemma by balancing distributive justice (dividing equally among all citizens) with beneficence (doing good and not harm)

Obligation is aimed primarily at public policy makers to encourage them to choose the best course of action for their citizen.

### KAY IDEASE

In making decision, one should promote or do what is good and prevent or eliminate what is harmful or evil.

Benefits and burdens should be distributed

equally throughout society All people must be

treated according to their merits and needs

### LIMITATION

The two basic principles of Obligation justices and beneficence- may conflict in certain situations

The theory can be useful for determining public policy but hold little particularity for making decisions that will affect one person.

Obligation provide little guidance for solving specific ethical dilemmas faced by the health care provider