Objectives

- Review ethical principles
- Discuss ethical dilemmas that involve triage, medical futility, do-not-attempt resuscitation orders, and withdrawal of life support
- Define types of advance directives used to guide care
- Discuss examples that outline the decision-making process used in medical ethics
Case Study

- 68-year-old man with cardiac arrest who responded to resuscitation
- Spontaneous breathing present
- No other brain stem reflexes in ED
- Remains in deep coma 3 days later

Should further therapy be limited or withdrawn?

What type of ethical dilemma is represented by this situation?
Case Study

- 68-year-old man post cardiac arrest who remains in deep coma 3 days later
- Should therapy be limited or withdrawn?

What process should be utilized to address these issues?
Ethical Dilemmas

- Apply ethical principles
- Determine medical facts
- Identify decision maker
- Develop consensus
- Clear, truthful communication
- Recognize conflicts
- Document
- Involve ethics team
Ethical Principles

- Autonomy: right to be self-directing
- Beneficence: obligation to act in the best interest of the patient
- Nonmaleficence: obligation to do no harm
- Justice: duty to treat all patients fairly and equitably

Which principles apply in this case?
Case Study

- 68-year-old man post cardiac arrest who remains in deep coma 3 days later
- Should therapy be limited or withdrawn?

How do you apply the principle of autonomy?
Advance Directives

Verbal or written instructions that take effect in the future when certain conditions are met

- Living will
- Durable power of attorney for healthcare
- Healthcare proxy
- Next of kin
Case Study

- 68-year-old man post cardiac arrest who remains in deep coma
- No advance directives, and wife is the decision maker

How would you determine and communicate prognosis?

Is further care medically futile?
Determination of Futility

- Predicted outcome
- Available medical evidence or experience
- Patient/family expectations

Who determines when care is futile?

- Wife wants everything done
- Medical team feels care is futile

Now what?
Case Study

- 6 months later, patient has urosepsis and hemodynamic instability
- Unable to be weaned
- Aspiration pneumonia, decubitus ulcers, malnutrition
- ICU transfer requested and ICU is full

Should you send out the patient with recent closed head injury who is stable and not ventilated?
**Triage**

- Demand for ICU beds often exceeds supply
- Objective admission criteria
- Equitable application of policies and protocols

Who should make the decision regarding admission to the ICU?
Case Study

- 17-year-old male with cystic fibrosis
- Written advance directive
- Intubated for respiratory distress
- Parents demand extubation and comfort care
- Patient is sedated

Should the patient be extubated?

What other issues might be considered?
Questions
Key Points

- Healthcare professionals should act on the principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice
- Consensus from the healthcare team facilitates consistent communication and documentation and minimizes liability
- Specific components of conflict within an ethical dilemma can usually be identified
- Life support may be withdrawn, but care is never withdrawn at the end of life