



ETHICAL ISSUES IN OPTOMETRY

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AUTONOMY

The right of an individual to make their own choices about their lives

Health care practitioners have a duty to respect a person's right to exercise autonomy.

Autonomy can only be exercised if the patient is kept informed about their treatment, treatment options and choices



SECONDARY PRINCIPLES

Informed consent

Confidentiality

BENEFACTENCE

Striving to do good and to do the best for each patient.

It recognises the duty of care that a practitioner has in respect of every patient.

The objective of good clinical practice is that the patient leaves the clinic in a better state than when they arrived

NON MALEFICENCE

The avoidance of harm

Requires the balancing of risks and benefits and making decisions that will optimise the benefits and minimise the risks of harm.

JUSTICE

Being fair in the distribution of resources including time.

Treating patients without discrimination

DIGNITY

Treating patients as individuals of worth

Includes respecting their right to confidentiality of information.

The owner of the 'See Straight' Company is visited by a supplier of an exclusive brand of spectacle frames. If he signs up to this arrangement and reaches a certain sales target the supplier will reward the boss with an all-expenses paid trip to a Pacific island.

Peter is a relatively new employee at "See Straight". The boss has asked all employees to promote the brand and offers a bonus for the employee who sells the most frames. A patient comes in for an examination and then proceeds to choose their frames. It is clear from your earlier discussion with the patient that they are concerned about the cost of frames as they were recently made redundant.

What ethical issues can you identify in this case?

ISSUES

Duty to patient

Conflict of interest

Responsibilities to employer

Own interests

Beneficence – non maleficence

Autonomy – pressure

Truthtelling – what should the patient be told?

THE NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS CODE OF ETHICS


Optometrists shall

4: Disclose any significant proprietary interest they have in the care options recommended and not permit pecuniary gain to affect their clinical judgement.

14: Ensure that any arrangement to reward effort or performance does not have the potential to bias a practitioner's clinical judgement towards decisions that may not be in the patient's best interest.

STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT FOR DISPENSING OPTICIANS

2.1: The patient's welfare is paramount. The dispensing optician must ensure that their commercial interests or those of their employer are not permitted to override the independent exercise of their professional judgement with regard to a patient, or to compromise the standard of care provided, or to affect their cooperation with other healthcare providers. Dispensing opticians who are employers must likewise refrain from exerting pressures on their staff that may compromise patient welfare.



A mother brings her child to see you on the recommendation of the preschool teacher who says that the child has difficulty identifying shapes. The mother says that they have only come to “shut the teacher up” as she is not prepared to ‘have a son of hers” wearing glasses as he will be ridiculed when he goes to school.

What ethical issues can you identify in this case?

ISSUES

Rights of the child

Authority of the mother to make a choice on behalf of the child

Best interest of the child (beneficence)

Non-maleficence