

What Is Ethics Quality?

When most people in health care think of quality, they think of technical quality (e.g., clinical indicators) and service quality (e.g., patient satisfaction). But ethics quality is equally important. For example, let's say a patient undergoes a surgical procedure. From a technical quality perspective, the operation was perfectly executed, and from a service quality perspective, the patient was perfectly satisfied with the care he received. So the care was of high quality, right? Well, not necessarily. Imagine that the patient was never really informed—or was even misinformed—about the procedure he received. This would indicate a problem with ethics quality.

Here's how the IntegratedEthics model defines ethics quality in health care:

Practices throughout an organization are consistent with widely accepted ethical standards, norms, or expectations for the organization and its staff.

The IntegratedEthics icebergⁱ illustrates how ethical practices cut across three levels of ethics quality:

- decisions or actions by individual staff (e.g., informed consent practices),
- systems and processes that guide behavior (e.g., ethics program standards), and
- environment and culture (e.g., employees' perceptions of the organization as a whole).

The IntegratedEthics concept of ethics quality is broad, spanning clinical, organizational, and research ethics. To encompass the full range of ethical issues that health care organizations encounter, IntegratedEthics defines ten domains of ethics in health careⁱⁱ.

ⁱ <http://www.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/iceberg.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/domains.pdf>