### IDENTIFY an Issue

Be proactive in identifying ethics issues
- Gather and maintain a list of ethics issues
- Ensure that those who may wish to refer ethics issues are knowledgeable about the preventive ethics team and what it does
- Establish regular contact with potential referral sources, such as the ethics consultation service and other members of the IntegratedEthics® program, senior management, service and program heads and quality management staff
- Examine other sources of information such as accreditation reviews, patient advocate reports and sentinel event reports

Characterize each issue
- Screen potential ethics issues and exclude those outside the scope of ISSUES
- Determine if a candidate issue likely possesses an ethics quality gap
  - Does the issue fall into one or more of the domains/topics of ethics in health care?
  - Is there a potential ethical standard source?
  - Are there data on current ethics practice, or can data be easily collected?
- Keep a log of issues for future consideration

Clarity each issue by listing the improvement goal
- Provide a general statement of the desired outcome of the improvement
- Indicate a direction of change (increase or decrease)

Prioritize the issues and select one
- Select an issue in which the improvement effort is likely to have a real impact on the facility’s ethics practices and would be a high priority for leadership or other important stakeholders
- Consider these questions:
  - Does this issue align with strategic goals?
  - What is the level of risk for this issue?
  - What is the level of impact on patients and/or employees?
  - What are the resources required?
  - What is the likelihood of success?
  - Is this a time-sensitive issue?

### STUDY the Issue

Diagram the process behind the relevant practice
- Collect firsthand information from multiple sources
- Include people who are directly involved in the process
- Draw and label a process flow diagram

Describe best ethics practice using ethical standards
- Identify appropriate sources for the ethical standard
- Describe the ethical standard, including any exclusions
- When appropriate, consult with the subject matter experts and/or the ethics consultation service
- Draft an operational definition of the best ethics practice based on ethical standards, exclusions to standards and details of the specific ethics issue

Describe current ethics practice using quantifiable information
- Consider what information should be collected to evaluate if the best ethics practice is being met
- Keep data collection efforts simple and targeted
- Consider how much data should be collected
- Write the operational definition of the current ethics practice based on baseline data
- When appropriate, consult with local quality management or systems redesign staff

Refine the improvement goal to reflect the ethics quality gap
- Determine how much improvement is achievable
- Complete the statement, which includes a direction of change (increase or decrease), the statement of the ethical practice (best ethics practice description), current ethics practice (baseline data) and achievable goal (how much improvement can be achieved) with a timeframe for the improvement

### SELECT a Strategy

Identify the major cause(s) of the ethics quality gap
- Write cause question using current ethics practice, beginning with, “What causes …”
- Involve process and content experts
- Review process flow diagram for unnecessary complexities and redundancies, simplifying and standardizing where possible
- Brainstorm major causes of the ethics quality gap
- Use a fishbone or other cause-and-effect tool to organize the identified causes
- Select the top two to three causes and drill down to the root cause for each

Identify change strategies to address the cause(s) of the ethics quality gap
- For each cause, identify what strategies will most likely impact the cause
- Search for strategies with the highest likelihood of success, the maximum impact and the lowest resource requirements

Select one or more strategies for small-scale testing
- Weigh the likely impacts in terms of magnitude and the degree to which the strategy can be sustained over time
- Consider possible unintended consequences of the strategy
- Make sure the strategy itself is not ethically problematic
- Identify where the strategy should first be tested on a small scale
- Contact individuals outside of the preventive ethics team to obtain additional information or support as necessary
This card describes the ISSUES approach, a practical, systematic process for addressing ethics quality gaps that arise in health care institutions.

This process involves six steps:
- **Identify an Issue**
- **Study the Issue**
- **Select a Strategy**
- **Undertake a Plan**
- **Evaluate and Adjust**
- **Sustain and Spread**

Based on principles and methods of quality improvement, the ISSUES approach was designed to help preventive ethics teams improve the systems and processes that influence health care ethics practices within a facility.

Although these steps are presented in a linear fashion, ISSUES is a fluid process. It may be necessary to repeat steps in order to achieve a particular improvement goal.