

# *Ethical dilemmas, distress or courage:*

*How do ethical responsibilities and  
quality work environments impact  
your nursing practice?*

Mental Health Conference  
October 28, 2011

Margot McNamee  
Laurie Sourani

# *Clinical Example*

Lorelei lives in a supportive housing unit and she has completely overwhelmed the space she occupies with suitcases full of belongings that she brings back from her son's home each time she visits him. You feel that this 'hoarding' now presents a fire hazard for the Lorelei and for other residents in the unit.

What are your options and what are the ethical issues that should be addressed before taking action.

What tools can you use to help review this issue and develop an action plan?



# What is a Code of Ethics?

- A public declaration of the beliefs and values of a profession and the members of that profession.
- For nurses, it's a statement of their ethical commitments to persons with health care needs and persons receiving care.



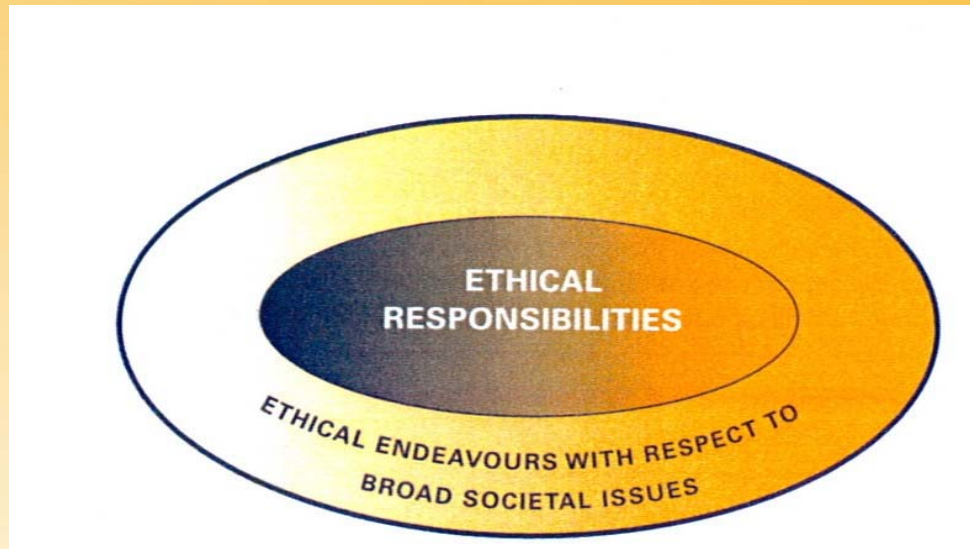
# Context for Codes of Ethics

| 1954   | Today   |
|--|---|
| CNA adopts ICN code as first code of ethics                                  | CNA launches Centennial version of code   |
| Hydrogen bomb is tested  | A British company has developed a process to incorporate antimicrobial compounds into textiles to fight superbugs |
| Brown vs Board of Education makes segregated schools in USA unconstitutional | Barack Obama is first Black President of USA  |
| First kidney transplant in Boston and Paris                                  | Stem cell research in a number of diseases  |
| First Burger King opens  | Private member bill in Canada to force chain restaurants to list calorie counts on menus                          |
| Ernest Hemingway is awarded Nobel Prize in literature                        | JMG Le Clezio is awarded the Nobel prize for poetic adventure and a focus on the environment                      |
| Dow Jones Industrial Average reaches highest point since 1929                | Dow Jones average bottoms out at 6500 losing 20% in 6 weeks   |
| RCA manufactures first colour TV   | Toshiba ends its war with Sony Blu Ray Disc   |



# Creating a balanced Code

- CNA created a Code which functions both as a regulatory and aspirational tool, by organizing the 2008 Code in two parts:
  - “Nursing Values and Ethical Responsibilities”
  - “Ethical Endeavours”



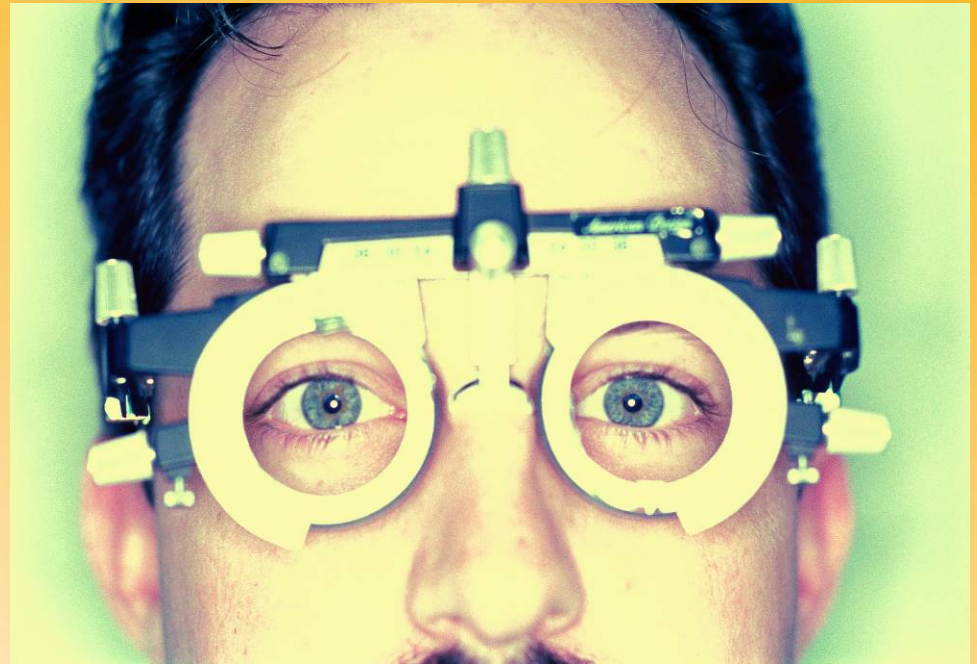
# Nursing Values and Ethical Responsibilities (Part I)

- describes the core responsibilities central to ethical nursing practice.
- comprised of 7 values :
  - Providing Safe, Competent and Ethical Care
  - Promoting Health and Well-being
  - Promoting Choice
  - Preserving Dignity
  - Maintaining Confidentiality
  - Promoting Justice
  - Being Accountable
- responsibility statements associated with each value

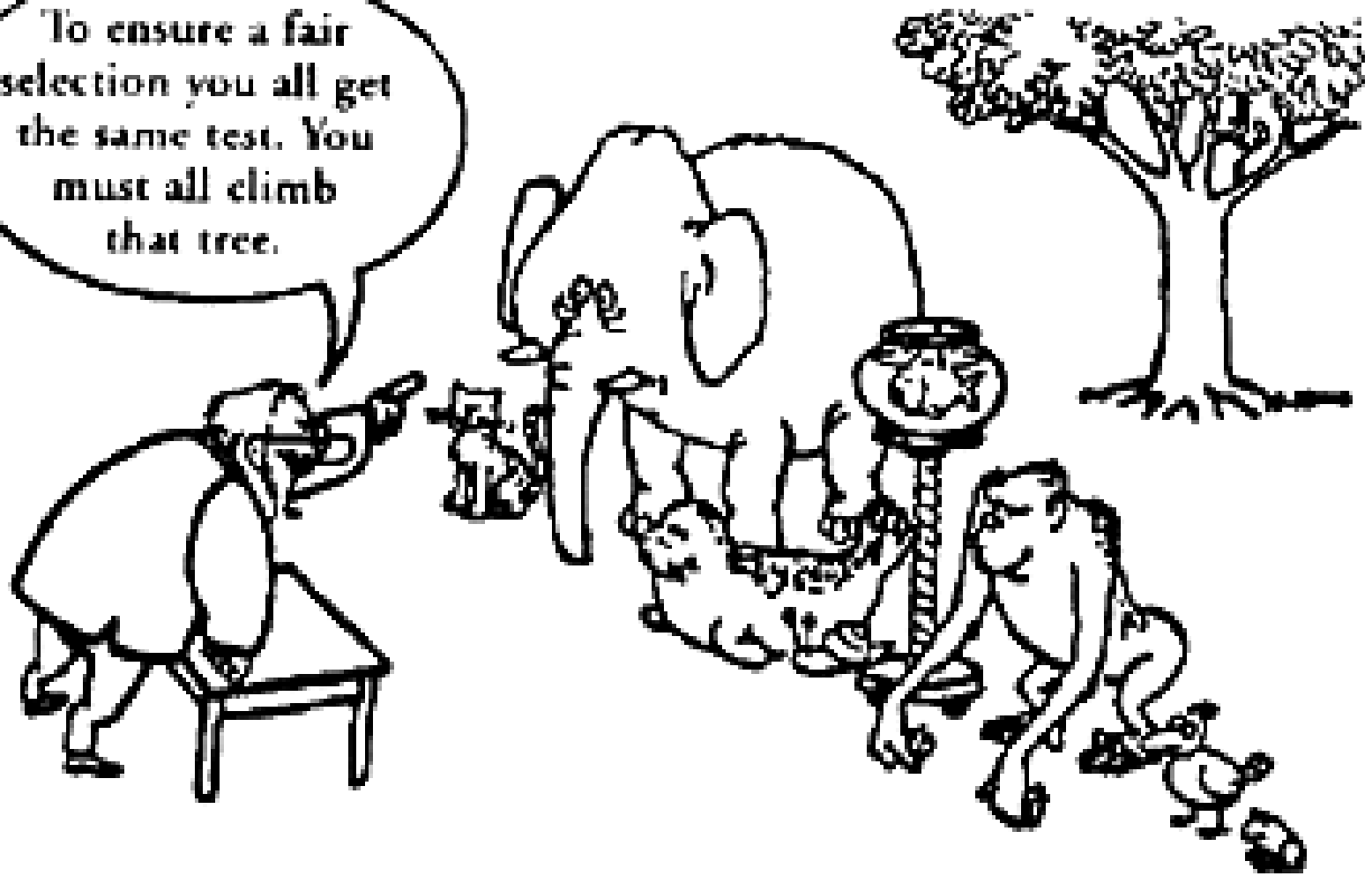


# Addressing Ethical Challenges in the Workplace

- Use an ethical lens



To ensure a fair selection you all get the same test. You must all climb that tree.



# Ethical Dilemma

- Arise when there are equally compelling reasons for and against two or more possible courses of action, and when choosing one means something else is relinquished.
- True dilemmas are infrequent in hc
- Usually we have complex ethical problems with multiple possible courses



# Ethical Distress

- Arises in situations where nurses know or believe they know the right thing to do, but for various reasons (including fear or circumstances beyond their control) do not or cannot take the right action or prevent a particular harm.
- When values and commitments are compromised in this way, nurses' identity and integrity is affected and they feel ethical distress



# Ethical courage

- Is exercised when a nurses stands firm on a point of moral principle or a particular decision about something in the face of overwhelming fear or threat to himself or herself



# Ethics Decision-Making Models

- Understand ethics of situation
- Reflect on available choices
- Maximize the good
- Take ethical action
- Review action



# Ethical Dilemma

## Lorelei's hoarding

- Dilemma in balancing her needs with needs of residence
- Distress if your action plan is rejected by owners
- Courage to push for you plan in the face of opposition



# Substance misuse

You notice a co-worker has been behaving differently, her charting is not as complete, she offers to carry the narcotic keys on every shift, she is often late or takes long breaks.

You suspect she has a problem with substance misuse

What do you do?

Dilemma, distress or courage?



# Vulnerable population

Chita has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. When he is in a manic phase he often buys presents for friends and neighbours and recently has bought a costly gift for the RN who is his primary care nurse.

You are new to the unit, and wonder what to do?



# Balancing needs

- Hilton comes from a very wealthy family and lives in a condo in one of the most expensive buildings in town. He has a diagnosis of schizophrenia and is being followed in the community. His neighbours have made complaints to the police about his behaviour and are trying to find a way to have him moved out of the building.
- What can you do as the manager of the clinic that follows Hilton?



# Ethics Tools

- Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses  
<http://www.cna-aiic.ca>
- Ethics in Practice Papers
- Ethics References and Reading resources
- Ethical Research Guidelines
- Position statements



Margaret (Margot) McNamee  
Senior Nurse Advisor  
[mmcnamee@cna-aiic.ca](mailto:mmcnamee@cna-aiic.ca)

