

Hospital Ethics Programme

Dr Philippe Foubert, Mater Hospital Ethicist

Clinical & Corporate Ethics Courses

Dr Philippe Foubert, Mater Hospital Ethicist, teaches ethics courses for Mater clinicians and members of the wider community, in four 7-week sessions throughout 1999. During 1998, 250 clinicians and community members received Certificates of Completion for clinical ethics courses at the Mater. For information, contact Roxanne Russell at phone (07) 3840 8870 or fax (07) 3840 8546.

Basic Clinical Ethics

This course covers ethical guidelines, and includes professional literature and case scenarios, on topics which include: basic clinical ethics obligations; the nature of suffering and the goals of care; emotion and communication; cultural and theological issues; determining capacity and informed consent; truth-telling and confidentiality; decisions to limit life-prolonging treatment; care of the dying; and resource allocation ethics.

Moral Issues in Caring for Suffering and Dying Patients

This course provides guidelines, literature, and cases, on topics such as: pain, suffering, and compassion; how sickness alters experience; what is a "Good (or perhaps Holy) Death?"; not for resuscitation orders; care of the terminally ill; physician assisted suicide and euthanasia; and theological interpretation of the meaning of suffering.

Corporate Ethics

This module of the Mercy 2000 Programme focuses on the ethical framework for corporate decision making. Models, processes, and cases which address ethical aspects of decision making within the executive and management of the Mater are discussed in the context of Catholic social ethics. An interactive format assures that participants' insights and experience contribute to eventual policy recommendations.

Ethics Case Consultation

Clinical ethics case consultation is provided, by request, as a 24-hour confidential service to all Mater patients, family, and clinical staff. Ethics case consultation is designed to support, not to replace, normal lines of communication about ethically troubling problems.

Requests for help from the Hospital Ethicist are encouraged when 1) a patient, family member, or staff member wants help to "talk through" important ethical dimensions of the patient's care; 2) efforts to resolve an ethical problem have reached an impasse; 3) there is serious ethical disagreement among the health care team or within the patient/family relationship; 4) the case is unusual, unprecedented, or very complex; and 5) a patient, family member, or staff member is alone and needs help when an ethically significant decision needs to be made.



Joy Vickerstaff, Executive Director of the Mater Adult Hospital, accepts her Certificate of Completion for the Basic Clinical Ethics course from Dr Philippe Foubert, Mater Hospital Ethicist.

Ethics Rounds and Workshops

The Hospital Ethicist participates in clinical ward rounds, with special focus on the various Mater intensive care units, to provide ethical advice as part of the interdisciplinary team approach to patient care. In addition, clinical ethics "in-service" sessions, special workshops, and tailored presentations on ethical issues arising in perinatal, children's, and adult clinical care, are a regular feature of the Hospital Ethics Programme.

The Ethics Advisory Council, Mater Governing Board

The Hospital Ethicist provides bioethics advice and professional support to the Ethics Advisory Council, a committee of the Mater Health Services Governing Board since 1997. The Ethics Advisory Council is a 13-member body which sponsors ethics policy development on matters of clinical, corporate, and community interest to the Mater Complex. The Council recently considered ethical aspects of the Mater Mother's Hospital first trimester ultrasound screening programme.

Hospital Ethics Policy Project

The Hospital Ethicist conducts and supports a consultative process of clinical ethics policy development in coordination with Executive Directors and Heads of Department within the Mater Hospitals. The goal is the completion of a comprehensive Hospital Ethics Policy Manual tailored to the needs of each hospital's patients and staff. Important current projects include collaboration with leadership of the Mater Adult Hospital on Informed Consent, and Compassionate Care of Critically Ill and Dying Patients.

Mater Research Secretariat Advisory Group

The Hospital Ethicist chairs the Advisory Group to the Mater Research Secretariat. This body supports the development of policies and procedures to enhance the Mater's process for scientific assessment and ethics review of research studies in the Mater hospitals. The Hospital Ethicist coordinates with the Research Secretariat in providing staff and community education on research ethics: an Orientation Programme for new ethics committee members, and Quarterly Workshops for investigators and ethics committee members on important recent issues in research ethics.

Mater Hospital Research Ethics Committees

The Hospital Ethicist participates in each Mater Hospital Research Ethics Committee review of research projects proposed for study of patients at the Mater. Last year the Mater Hospitals approved approximately 100 research studies. The Hospital Ethicist provides the research ethics community with a monthly Letter on Research Ethics which updates members on recent developments in the "ethical standard of care" for ethics committees. Ethics committees bear an important responsibility: to minimise risks for participants in research.

