



Reasoning with Ethics

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A Project of The School for Ethical Education | www.ethicsed.org

Ethics in action creates character.

Use this blog to:

1. Lead class discussions in social studies, civics, ethics or advisory classes.
2. Teach students skills to analyze cases with core ethical values.
3. Recognize skills in support of SEE's Tri-Factor Model of ethical functioning.

[Visit the online Ethics Blog.](#)



Triaging Care

The need to triage care is a sobering reality in the medical community. Triage by definition is the process of determining who gets priority for treatment when treatment capacity is limited. If person X is given priority (for any reason) then person Y might be left out of treatment if the staff to help, facilities to support help, or medication is in short supply. When everyone cannot be treated simultaneously, triage procedures need to be applied, and this defines a medical dilemma.



Triage procedures can apply to short-term disasters when natural or man-made tragedies overwhelm hospital facilities and can also apply to the current situation with COVID where patient loads exceed hospitals' capacity. This fall there are some cities in Italy facing the need to triage patients as they experience another wave of COVID. Some health professionals are warning that the need for patient triage is coming to the US this winter.

Medical professionals from large hospitals to rural EMT providers are trained in triage decision making. Triage decisions seek to allocate medical help to those patients who will experience the most benefit. In real life, there are no easy answers to many triage dilemmas. If you had a 12-year-old child and an 80-year-old person with identical injuries, who would you treat if you only had resources to treat one?

These difficult choices are a fact of life not only in crisis situations but also in "normal times" as our society ages and face limited medical resources. COVID has only exposed the need for clear triage policies as they apply to medical practice in an aging population. This is a weighty question for students to face. It will be their generation that must implement the policies that guide the triage of eldercare which will hopefully be guided by ethical values.

There are supplemental links on the blog website that provide several essays for students to reflect on this topic. What core ethical values should guide triage decisions? Recognizing there are no easy answers here, students are asked to consider how the ethical values in triage decisions may conflict? As an example, might the values of compassion and long-term benefit for helping a child conflict with the lack of fairness to seniors who in a simplified analysis, don't have as long to live and thus will not demonstrate the same potential benefit for treatment?

Supplemental Links

Colleen Barry | AP | November 12, 2020, [Italian hospitals face breaking point in fall virus surge](#)
Hospitals are reeling under a 46 percent spike in Covid-19 Patients (10/27/20) NYTimes - <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/27/us/coronavirus-hospitals-capacity.html>

Triage of Scarce Critical Care Resources in COVID-19 An Implementation Guide for Regional Allocation An Expert Panel Report of the Task Force for Mass Critical Care and the American College of Chest Physicians (July 2020) Chest- [https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692\(20\)30691-7/pdf](https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692(20)30691-7/pdf)

Wesley J. Smith | Daily Caller | May 11, 2012, Triaging care in COVID
['Futile care' duty to die may be coming to a hospital near you](#)

