



ETHICS IN PHYSICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

(Version 3 2026)

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Objectives

Course participants will be able to:

- 1) Define the ethical principles crucial to ethical decision making
- 2) Describe the APTA Core Values
- 3) Discuss the ethical commitments that serve as the basis for APTA's Standards of Conduct
- 4) Apply the APTA Code of Ethics for ethical decision making
- 5) Demonstrate through case analysis the ability to identify ethical conflicts and support a resolution to an ethical dilemma

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Ethics is the systemic study of and reflection on everyday morality. It is a discipline that uses special methods and approaches to examine moral situations. It is also reflection because it consciously calls into question assumptions about existing components of our morality. (Purtillo, 2011).

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Thinking from a physical therapy perspective:

- **Ethics is a set of justified principles, policies, ideals, attitudes, and conduct.**
- Descriptive ethics – the scientific basis
- Normative ethics – the moral basis

What is ethics?

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Why Study Ethics?

"Increased skill in making ethically sound decisions begins by being able to recognize which components of a situation have a moral quality. The physical therapist can then act accordingly, using his personal wisdom and the Code of Ethics of the American Physical Therapy Association as guides" (Purtillo, 1974).

"Ethics is the heart of professionalism." (Gabard et al, 2003).

". . . it is anticipating and recognizing health care dilemmas and making good judgments and decisions based on universal values that work in unison with the laws of the land . . ." (Pozgar, 2016)

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A Review of Ethical Principles

"the pillars of ethical decision making" (APTA Code of Ethics)

- Autonomy
- Beneficence
- Nonmaleficence
- Justice
- Veracity
- Fidelity

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Autonomy

Respecting the rights of others

- Privacy
- Confidentiality
- Informed consent

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Beneficence

- Ensuring the welfare and safety of others
- To advance the good of the individual and society

Can conflict at times with autonomy

Example: Your patient tells you in confidence that his/her injuries were the result of an abusive situation in the home.

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Non-maleficence

Making decisions and/or taking actions with the intent of preventing harm or wrongdoing

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Justice

Making objective decisions and taking actions that result in an equitable outcome

- Respect for human dignity
- Acknowledgement that we live in an interdependent community

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Veracity

Being honest and truthful in all professional decisions and actions

This obligation will also be seen in the statutes and Rules for physical therapy practice in TN.

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Fidelity

Treating everyone with respect, fairness, discretion, and integrity

- Individuals to groups to society as whole

Patients' expectations of you include: 1) Respect, 2) Competency, 3) Adherence to your professional ethics, 4) Compliance with policies, and that you 5) Honor what was agreed to for their care (Purtillo)

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Case Example

A patient shares with you in confidence that they are fearful to return home for recovery from their injury as their injury was caused by their "troubled" adult child who lives with them and this is not the first time this has happened. The patient, recognizing the significance of what they have shared, specifically asks you to not share this information with anyone.

What ethical principle(s) would apply here?

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Case Example

Mary receives an order to evaluate and treat a patient in the acute care hospital where she works. Upon reviewing the patient's chart she learns that the patient is homeless and has HIV. Mary does not want to treat the patient and instead calls another therapist and asks if she can "trade" patients with him. When he declines, she gowns, gloves and masks and begrudgingly goes into see the patient. She maintains a significant distance from the patient at all times and completes the evaluation without touching the patient.

What ethical principle(s) would apply here?

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Tools for Ethical Decision Making

- APTA:
 - Core Values in Physical Therapy
 - Ethical Commitments and Standards of Conduct
 - Code of Ethics
- Ethical Decision-Making models
 - RIPS Model of Ethical Decision-Making with Case Analysis

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APTA Core Values

Accountability	Duty
Altruism	Excellence
Collaboration	Inclusion
Compassion and Caring	Integrity
	Social Responsibility

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- **Accountability** is active **acceptance of the responsibility for the diverse roles, obligations, and actions** of the physical therapist and physical therapist assistant including self-regulation and other behaviors that positively influence patient and client outcomes, the profession, and the health needs of society.
- **Altruism** is the **primary regard for or devotion to the interest of patients and clients**, thus assuming the responsibility of placing the needs of patients and clients ahead of the physical therapist's or physical therapist assistant's self-interest.
- **Collaboration** is **working together with patients and clients, families, communities, and professionals** in health and other fields to achieve shared goals. Collaboration **within the physical therapist-physical therapist assistant team** is working together, within each partner's respective role, to achieve optimal physical therapist services and outcomes for patients and clients.

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- **Compassion** is the **desire to identify with** or sense something of another's experience, a precursor of caring. **Caring** is the **concern, empathy, and consideration** for the needs and values of others.
- **Duty** is the **commitment to meeting one's obligations to provide effective physical therapist services** to patients and clients, to serve the profession, and to positively influence the health of society.
- **Excellence** in the provision of physical therapist services occurs when the physical therapist and physical therapist assistant **consistently use current knowledge and skills while understanding personal limits**, integrate the patient or client perspective, embrace advancement, and challenge mediocrity.

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- **Inclusion** occurs when the physical therapist and physical therapist assistant **create a welcoming and equitable environment** for all. Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are inclusive when they commit to **providing a safe space, elevating diverse and minority voices, acknowledging personal biases that may impact patient care, and taking a position of anti-discrimination**.
- **Integrity** is steadfast **adherence to high ethical principles** or standards, being truthful, ensuring fairness, following through on commitments, and verbalizing to others the rationale for actions.
- **Social responsibility** is the **promotion of a mutual trust between the profession and the larger public** that necessitates responding to societal needs for health and wellness.

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Core Values Self-Assessment

This may be accessed on the APTA website:
Self-Assessment: Core Values for the Physical Therapist and the Physical Therapist Assistant (2024)
<https://www.apta.org/your-practice/ethics-and-professionalism/professionalism-in-physical-therapy-core-values-self-assessment>

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Case Example

Sam has been a PTA for 15 years. For the last year or so Sam's clinic manager has noticed a change in Sam. Although he completes his assignments, he appears to have no interest in teaming with his colleagues, he no longer contributes to staff meetings, the other therapists have noted that he seems to do the same treatment routine with all of his patients and does not try to progress them, and he always has some excuse to not participate in the department's service projects. Just recently, Sam submitted his CEU documentation for his personnel file and the clinic manager noted that Sam had waited until the very last minute to complete these hours and the coursework did not at all relate to their practice setting.

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Code of Ethics

Defines the values and expected behaviors of a profession and validates personal values of those in the profession. It also provides the members of that profession with consistent moral language and guidelines for ethical action. This in turn demonstrates to the public a level of professionalism.

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NEW!

The Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession

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Why the change?

Why did the Code need to change?

- 1) To provide clarity
- 2) To be enforceable
- 3) To eliminate multiple documents
- 4) To better align with Core Values
- 5) To improve the usability

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The new Code of Ethics now contains 9 Ethical Commitments with Standards of Conduct.

- **The Ethical Commitments:**
 - ✓ “Detail the elements of the ethical fiduciary duty of PTs and PTAs to act in the best interest of their patients and clients” (APTA).
 - ✓ Serve as a basis for the enforceable Standards of Conduct
- **The Standards of Conduct:**
 - ✓ Address[es] the actions of PTs and PTAs in their roles in patient and client management, consultation, education, research, and administration.
 - ✓ Used to assess whether APTA members have engaged in unethical conduct

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APTA Ethical Commitments

- | | |
|---|---|
| Respect | Responsible Business and Organizational Practice |
| Integrity | Direction and Supervision |
| Accountability | Professional Expertise |
| Maintaining Professional Relationships | Societal Responsibility |
| Compassion and Trust | |

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APTA Code of Ethics 2026

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RESPECT

PTs and PTAs shall respect the rights and dignity of all individuals.

- 1.1 Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall not discriminate against any person.
- 1.2. . . . shall protect patient’s and clients’ confidential information and not disclose confidential information except as authorized by the patient or client or as permitted or required by law.

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Respect Examples

- 1.A Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants **shall strive** to acknowledge and respect an individual’s known identity and culture.
- 1.B . . . shall strive to recognize their explicit and implicit personal biases.

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INTEGRITY

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall act with professional integrity and responsibility and fulfill their respective legal and ethical obligations.

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INTEGRITY cont.

- 2.1 The **physical therapist** shall retain full responsibility for all physical therapist services provided under the provisions of the physical therapist's license, including all aspects of the evaluation and management of the patient or client.
- 2.2 . . . shall obtain ongoing informed consent after providing information that is understandable, honest, and necessary to allow the patient or client or their surrogate to make informed decisions about participation in physical therapist services or research.
- 2.3 . . . having knowledge that, in their reasonable judgment, raises a substantial question as to whether a colleague is unfit to perform their professional responsibilities with competence and safety shall report this information to the appropriate authorities.

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INTEGRITY cont.

- 2.4 . . . shall address known illegal or unethical acts by physical therapy personnel or that affect physical therapist services.
- 2.5 . . . shall comply with applicable mandatory reporter laws for suspected cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation involving children or vulnerable adults.
- 2.6 . . . involved in research shall comply with accepted standards governing the protection of research participants.

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Integrity Examples

- 2.A . . . shall strive to discourage misconduct by any physical therapy personnel or other health care professionals and make appropriate reports of known illegal or unethical acts, including verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual harassment.
- 2.B . . . shall strive to demonstrate integrity in their relationships with patients and clients, families, colleagues, students, research participants, other health care providers, employers, payers, and the public.
- 2.C . . . shall strive to ensure that they take appropriate action to address known illegal or unethical acts by physical therapy personnel or that affect physical therapist services, such as by speaking directly to the individual, consulting with mentors, or reporting the misconduct to a supervisor or relevant legal authority.

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ACCOUNTABILITY

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall be accountable for making sound professional judgments and decisions within the scope of practice established by laws and regulations.

- 3.1 . . . shall not exceed their professional, jurisdictional, and personal scopes of practice and shall communicate with, collaborate with, or refer to a peer or other health care professionals when necessary.

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ACCOUNTABILITY cont.

- 3.2 . . . shall practice without impairment from substance misuse and without impairment from cognitive deficiency or mental illness that, even with appropriate reasonable accommodation, adversely affects their practice.
- 3.3 . . . shall comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations, including any duty to report when concerned about the safety of other individuals.

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Accountability Examples

3.A **Physical therapists** shall strive to demonstrate independent and objective professional judgment and make decisions in the patient's or client's best interests in all settings.

3.B **Physical therapists** shall strive to make professional judgments and decisions that are informed by professional standards, evidence, provider knowledge and experience, and patient and client values.

3.C **Physical therapist assistants** shall strive to make decisions in the patient's or client's best interests, in consultation with the physical therapist.

3.D . . . shall strive to be accountable for the accuracy and truthfulness of information they disseminate, including in the use of emerging technologies, such as social media and artificial intelligence.

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Maintaining Professional Relationships

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall respect the boundaries of professional, therapeutic, organizational, and personal relationships to promote a safe environment.

- 4.1 . . . shall not abusively exploit persons over whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or other authority (e.g., patients and clients, students, supervisees, research participants, and employees).

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Maintaining Professional Relationships cont.

- 4.2 . . . shall not engage in any sexual relationship with any of their patients and clients, supervisees, or students.
- 4.3 . . . shall not harass anyone verbally, physically, emotionally, or sexually.
- 4.4 **Physical therapists** shall provide reasonable notice and information about alternative sources for obtaining care if the physical therapist terminates the provider relationship while the patient or client continues to need physical therapist services.

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Maintaining Professional Relationships Examples

- 4.A . . . shall avoid initiating or entering into sexual relationships with individuals over whom they have significant influence on patients' and clients' care decisions and should refer patients and clients to other providers if an existing close personal or sexual relationship with such a person might influence or impinge on the integrity of the relationship between the provider and patient or client.
- 4.B . . . shall strive to collaborate with patients and clients to empower them in making decisions about their health care.
- 4.C . . . shall strive to create an inclusive and civil work environment that strives to promote each colleague's sense of belonging.
- 4.D . . . shall strive to, as appropriate, encourage colleagues with physical, psychological, or substance-related impairments that may adversely impact their professional responsibilities to seek assistance or counsel.

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COMPASSION AND TRUST

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall be trustworthy and compassionate in addressing the rights and needs of patients and clients.

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COMPASSION AND TRUST cont.

- 5.1 . . . shall provide the information necessary to allow patients and clients, or their surrogates, to make informed decisions about physical therapist services or participation in clinical research, including ensuring that information regarding the authorship of clinical documentation, patient education materials, publications, and presentations is truthful, accurate, and relevant.
- 5.2 . . . shall address barriers to communication and comprehension with recipients of services, caregivers, students, and research participants.

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Compassion and Trust Examples

5.A . . . shall strive to demonstrate care and compassion in the provision of physical therapist services.

5.B . . . shall strive to be responsible and accountable for the use of respectful, accurate, and truthful written, verbal, and nonverbal communication in all forms, including social media.

5.C . . . shall strive to recognize the public trust placed in them as health care professionals and maintain professional responsibility when information is disseminated using current and emerging technologies, including but not limited to social media and artificial intelligence.

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RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall promote accountable and truthful organizational behaviors and business practices.

➤ 6.1 . . . shall provide information about their services that is truthful and accurate and shall not make misleading representations in any forms of communication, including billing.

➤ 6.2 . . . shall ensure that documentation for physical therapist services accurately reflects the provider, nature, and extent of the services provided.

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RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES cont.

➤ 6.3 . . . shall disclose any conflicts of interest and not permit any conflicts of interest to interfere with professional judgments and decisions.

➤ 6.4 . . . shall not, at any time, accept gifts or other considerations that influence or give an appearance of influencing their professional judgment and decision-making.

➤ 6.5 . . . shall fully disclose any financial interest they have in products or services that they recommend to patients and clients or to the public.

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RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES cont.

➤ 6.6 **Physical therapists** shall ensure that patients and clients are informed of their financial obligations prior to incurring charges so that shared decision-making can be incorporated into the treatment plan.

➤ 6.7 . . . shall not knowingly enter into or continue any employment or other arrangements that prevent them from fulfilling professional and ethical obligations to patients and clients.

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Responsible Business and Organizational Practice Examples

6.A . . . shall strive to provide relevant and truthful information to current and prospective patients and clients about the services to be provided.

6.B . . . shall strive to promote environments that support independent and accountable professional judgment as well as ethical and accountable decision-making.

6.C . . . shall strive to seek compensation that supports the provision of legal, safe, and effective physical therapist services.

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DIRECTION AND SUPERVISION

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall provide appropriate and timely direction to and communication with anyone over whom they have legal supervisory responsibility.

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DIRECTION AND SUPERVISION cont.

- 7.1 **Physical therapists** shall ensure that all duties directed to other physical therapy personnel are congruent with the credentials, qualifications, competencies, and legal scope of practice or scope of work of the individual.
- 7.2 **Physical therapist assistants** shall provide physical therapist services under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist and shall communicate with the physical therapist when the patient's or client's status requires modification to the established plan of care.
- 7.3 **Physical therapists** shall exercise primary responsibility for the supervision of physical therapist assistants and support personnel.

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DIRECTION AND SUPERVISION cont.

- 7.4 **Physical therapist assistants** shall support and respect the supervisory role of the physical therapist to ensure quality of care and promote patient and client safety.
- 7.5 **Physical therapist assistants** shall take responsibility to communicate in a timely manner to the supervising physical therapist any areas in which they do not have the necessary level of knowledge and skill to practice safely and effectively.

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Direction and Supervision Example

7.A . . . shall strive to take responsibility to mentor learners in order to help the learners develop knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that will enable them to provide safe and effective care while embodying professionalism.

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall enhance their expertise and competency through career-long acquisition and refinement of knowledge, skills, abilities, and professional behaviors.

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE cont.

- 8.1 **Physical therapists** shall recognize and practice within the limits of their skills and competence and refer a patient or client to another health care professional when it is in the best interests of the patient or client.
- 8.2 . . . shall practice consistent with accepted current standards of care.

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Professional Expertise Examples

8.A . . . shall strive to develop and maintain competence and exercise appropriate care in using current and emerging technologies, including but not limited to social media and artificial intelligence.

8.B . . . shall strive to engage in professional development based on critical self-assessment and reflection on changes in physical therapist practice, education, health care delivery, and technology.

8.C . . . shall strive to evaluate the strength of evidence and applicability of content presented during professional development activities before integrating the content or techniques into practice, as appropriate to their professional roles.

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Professional Expertise Examples cont.

8.D . . . shall strive to cultivate and support practice environments that support professional development, career-long learning, and excellence.

8.E . . . shall strive to reflect on and take action needed to maintain their own physical, emotional, and mental health, and seek outside assistance when needed.

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SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants shall participate in efforts to meet the health needs of people locally, nationally, and globally.

(Serves as ethical commitment and Standard of Conduct)

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Societal Responsibilities Examples

9.A . . . strive to provide resources to assist those who they believe are in harm's way.

9.B . . . shall strive to recognize and address the multiple determinants of health that impact an individual's ability to optimize their own health and shall strive to provide appropriate suggestions to patients and clients of available community resources.

9.C . . . shall strive to advocate to reduce health disparities and health care inequities, improve access to health care services, and address the health, wellness, and preventive health care needs of people.

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Societal Responsibilities Examples cont.

9.D . . . shall strive to recognize and respect the unique roles of other health professions and engage in interprofessional collaboration to meet the individual needs of people as well as improve access to appropriate services.

9.E . . . shall strive to provide pro bono physical therapist services or support organizations that meet the needs of people who are economically disadvantaged, uninsured, or underinsured.

9.F . . . shall strive to be responsible stewards of health care services and advocate for just utilization of those services, including taking action to reduce barriers to access.

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Societal Responsibilities Examples cont.

9.G . . . shall strive to educate the public about the scope of practice and benefits of physical therapy as part of interprofessional collaborative practice to protect and advance the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and populations.

9.H . . . shall strive to be good stewards of limited resources and take action to avoid unnecessary waste of those resources.

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In Summary

- ❖ Significant changes from the 2010 version of the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Ethical Conduct (former guiding documents have not yet been revised but will be in the future)
- ❖ The two former separate documents now merged into a cohesive document emphasizing the mutual and interwoven responsibilities and expectations of the PT and PTA
- ❖ Clear alignment with ethical principles and the Core Values of the APTA

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Creating an Ethical Climate

An ethical climate requires:

- Moral responsibility
 - Especially as set forth by the Code of Ethics
 - Cannot be lost in concerns for profit or power
- Trust and trustworthiness
 - A sense of mutual trust built upon the trustworthiness of professionals
- Fair and effective conflict resolution
 - "Each member [of an organization, team, association] must nourish a seed of self-governance, assume ultimate responsibility for his or her own actions, and be sensitive and responsive to those committed to his or her care" (Purtillo).

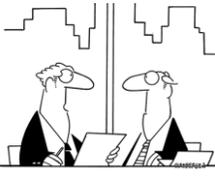
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Types of Ethical Issues



- COMPLIANCE
- DISAGREEMENT
- VAGUENESS
- DILEMMAS**

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Ethical Decision Making

What ethical theory do we base our decision making on?

- One that is clear, consistent, and comprehensive
- One that is simple and practical
- ONE THAT IS COMPATIBLE WITH OUR MORAL CONVICTIONS AND OUR PROFESSIONAL CODE OF ETHICS

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Ethical Decision-Making Model

*"Ethical decision-making is complex, as the relationship between PTs and PTAs and their patients and clients doesn't occur in a bubble; it's affected by outside influences, such as the clinician's facility and payment sources. The **Realm-Individual Process-Situation model** of ethical decision-making — often called the **RIPS model** — was developed to address the various influences on the clinician's decisions."*

Laura Lee (Dolly) Swisher, PT, PhD;
Linda E. Arslanian, PT, DPT, MS; and
Carol M. Davis, PT, EdD, FAPTA

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The RIPS Model of Ethical Decision-Making

Realm	Individual Process	Ethical Situation
Individual (relationship between individuals)	Moral Sensitivity (recognize situation)	Conflict (values are challenged)
Organizational/Institutional (good of the organization)	Moral Judgment (deciding right or wrong actions)	Dilemma (right vs. right situation)
Societal (common good)	Moral Motivation (moral values above other values)	Distress (right course of action blocked by a barrier)
	Moral Courage (implement action)	Temptation (right vs. wrong situation)
		Silence (values are challenged but no one is addressing it)

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RIPS – Realm

It can be the individual level followed by the organizational/institutional level, and then the societal level.

The levels are interdependent and the complexity of issues increases as one moves out from the individual realm into the others.

Although one realm is typically the most important, every situation has implications for the other realms.

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RIPS – Individual Process

- Moral Sensitivity** – recognizing, interpreting, and framing ethical situations
- Moral Judgment** – deciding on right versus wrong actions
- Moral Motivation** – placing a priority on ethical values over other values
- Moral Courage** – implementing the chosen ethical action in spite of barriers

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RIPS – Ethical Situation

Ethical Conflict:
When values, goals or duties conflict or are challenged

When you aren't sure which action to take

When it isn't clear what is the best thing to do

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RIPS – Ethical Situation

Ethical Dilemma:
When two or more clear principles or values apply but they support mutually inconsistent courses of action

When choosing one "good" principle clearly violates another principle or allows a negative consequence

When you cannot avoid the conflict of two competing principles

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RIPS – Ethical Situation

Ethical Distress:
When one knows the right thing to do, but organizational constraints make it nearly impossible to pursue the right course of action

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RIPS – Ethical Situation

Ethical Temptation:
Involves a choice between a "right" and a "wrong."

You may stand to benefit from doing the wrong thing.

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RIPS – Ethical Situation

Silence:
Ethical values are challenged, but no one is speaking about this challenge.

This may be the course taken by an individual who is experiencing moral distress.

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Let's Practice!

The following 2 slides have case examples. Consider these questions:

1. What **realm**, **individual process**, and **situation** would apply?
2. What rationale can you give to defend your decisions?

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Mandy visited the office of a local orthopedic surgeon. She hoped to illustrate her quality outcomes in order to encourage referrals. Midway through the visit, it became clear that the physician was unenthusiastic about her positive outcomes. Instead, it was clear that the MD expected some kind of gift. In fact, he stated bluntly that he would need tee times at the local country club to consider her request for more referrals from his office. Mandy wonders if she is just being naïve or if perhaps she should just "play the game."

- Edited from Swisher, Arslanian, & Davis

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After a lengthy period of extensive rehabilitation in the skilled nursing setting, a very grateful patient wishes to give his physical therapist a gift.

- Edited from Swisher, Arslanian, & Davis

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Implementing the RIPS Model of Ethical Decision-Making



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Step One – Recognize and Define the Ethical Issue

1. Gather all the facts available
2. Determine who has an interest in the issue
3. Use this information to help define the issues by analyzing the realm, individual process, and situation

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Step One – Recognize and Define the Ethical Issue

- ❓ What is the Realm?
- ❓ What is the Individual Process?
- ❓ What is the Situation?

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Step Two – Reflect

- ? What are the relevant laws, duties, and obligations that relate to the ethical issue?
- ? How do your professional resources speak to the situation?
e.g.– Code of Ethics

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Step Two – Alternatives

- Consider what alternatives you have for an action with the ethical issue?
- ? Changing one's own behavior
 - ? Attempt to change another's behavior
 - ? Attempt to effect a change in organizational policies or practices
 - ? Advocate to change an unjust law

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Step Two – Consequences

Consider the possible consequences of your actions for this ethical issue.

- ? Legal
- ? Monetary
- ? Professional
- ? Personal
- ? Community

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Step Two Determine: Is it a Right vs. Wrong Issue?

Does one of these tests apply?

- ? **Legal test** – Is something illegal? If so, it is probably not a true dilemma but a "hard choice."
- ? **Stench test** – Does it "feel" wrong? Such as, gut reaction?
- ? **Front-page test** – How would you like this on the front-page?
- ? **Mom test** – If I were my mother - would I do this?
- ? **Professional Ethics Test** – Do any of our core ethics documents prohibit or discourage the action?

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Step Two Determine: Is it a Right vs. Right Issue?

Does one of these paradigms apply?

- ? Truth vs. loyalty
- ? Self vs. community
- ? Short term vs. long term
- ? Justice vs. mercy

Classifying the ethical issue this way may help you to relate to similar dilemmas that you have faced and then choose a course of action.

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Step Three – Step Back Before You Act

- ? Is it really an either/or situation like the these previous slides have implied?
- ? Or, do the options both have negative outcomes?
 - If so, is there a third option that might avoid negative consequences?
 - Can I create a "Win-Win" in this situation?

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Step Three – Make a Decision

Three Approaches:

- **Rule-based** – follow the rules, duties, obligations, or ethical principles in place
- **Ends-based** – determine the consequences of alternative actions and the good or harm that will result for all involved
- **Care-based** – resolve dilemmas according to relations and concern for others

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Step Four – Implement and Evaluate

- Implement the plan
- Evaluate the process, outcomes, and lessons learned from the action
 - Do you need to take further action?
- Honestly assess what you need to do to prepare for the future

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Review of Ethical Analysis

- Gather all the facts
- Define the situation
- Who has an interest
- Identify values and obligations
- Review alternatives
- Consider the consequences
- Make a decision
- Carry out the plan
- Evaluate the process and the outcomes
- Learn for the future

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The Importance of Communication

- Differences in opinion do not necessarily mean you are facing an ethical dilemma
- Keep an open mind
- Accept and understand differences
- When in doubt, check it out
- Create an environment where people feel safe sharing ideas/opinions

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Discussion of Ethical Situations PTs and PTAs May Face



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Case Studies: Guiding Questions

- What realm(s) is/are involved? individual, organizational, or societal
- Which type of ethical situation is involved? conflict, dilemma, distress, temptation, silence
- Which ethical commitment and Standard of Conduct(s) relates to or assists with your options for the case?
- What Core Values and bioethical principles are relevant to the case?
- Can you offer options for resolutions to the case?

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Tom is a PTA student in his 3rd week of a clinical affiliation in a large hospital. Since the end of the first week Tom has had a full patient load and has rarely seen or talked to his CI, Claire. The department is very busy with Joint Commission preparation, and he knows that Claire is involved with that. His patient load has become more complex, and he is uncomfortable with the lack of supervision he is receiving. He has also noted that PT aides are treating more and more patients. He speaks with another PT, Bryce, about his concerns but is told that there is just "no way to meet the demand" if they don't stretch the rules some. Tom speaks with his DCE who visits with Claire. She is told that Tom is such a good student that minimal supervision is needed, although one of the PTs has been watching him from afar. Tom fears that if he complains more and is pulled from the clinical experience he will be delayed with his graduation as other placement is likely not feasible at this time.

Case 1

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Megan is a new graduate PT working in an acute rehabilitation hospital. She and an orthotist who is frequently at the facility have become friends and are now dating. Matthew, the orthotist, and his partner in the PO company are very excited about a new brace that they are now carrying. Matthew asks Megan to be a part of a Facebook post that they are recording to promote the brace. For the post, Megan excitedly states that she has seen a lot of great functional outcomes with the brace and that she will be using this brace solely in her practice at XXX rehab hospital. Sara, a classmate of Megan's, see the post and is quite surprised. She wonders what she should say or do. Consider this situation for Sara.

Case 2

APFATN

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Katie is a PT working in the physical therapy office of a large orthopedic physician group. She receives a referral from one of the physicians for a patient of his who has lymphedema. Katie does not feel that she can provide this patient the care that she needs and confirms that none of the other therapists in the PT office are adequately trained to treat this patient. She calls the physician to recommend a referral to another PT clinic nearby that has lymphedema trained therapists. The physician tells Katie to "just do the best you can" so that we can keep the patient "in house."

Case 3

APFATN

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Jennifer and Jamie are the PT and PTA of a multidisciplinary team providing therapy services in a small rural elementary school. Together they and the OT work with the children as a group with the assistance of the aides. Included in the group is a 7 y.o. Hispanic child with the diagnosis of spastic cerebral palsy. Jamie notes that his tone is significantly higher today and reports this to Jennifer. His mother is present today and has asked to speak with the team after the therapy session. In limited English she tells Jennifer and Jamie that she does not understand her son's therapy plan and why the therapists seem to "just be playing games" with her son. Jennifer carefully explains the therapy approach for CP while allowing the mother to ask questions. Jamie assists with some demonstration. They express concern about the child's increased tone. The mother becomes tearful stating that the family cannot afford her son's "muscle pill" right now. How should the therapy team respond?

Case 4

APFATN

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Jeremy has been seeing an elderly woman 3 times a week for 2 months now. Her initial diagnosis was a decline in function. The patient often brings Jeremy gifts, some of which are rather expensive. Casey, another PT in the clinic, fills in for Jeremy one day and notes that the patient's goals have all been achieved. She documents such and discusses with the patient her discharge plan at the next visit. Later that week Casey notices that the patient is seeing Jeremy again and is on the schedule for 3 more weeks. Casey asks Jeremy about the patient and he says that she is lonely and he doesn't have the heart to discharge her. Besides, she has good insurance, he says. Casey is conflicted but knows she has to do something. Consider this situation for Casey.

Case 5

APFATN

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George, a morbidly obese disabled veteran, comes into an outpatient clinic, requesting PT services. His doctor referred him to this clinic because of their great reputation. Mary, a PT working at the clinic, just happened to be at the front desk when George came in. After George leaves, Mary tells the receptionist not to assign George to her schedule because she is repulsed by his body odor and foul language. The patient was scheduled two days later with another PT. Ellen, a PTA who works with Mary, overheard Mary's conversation. Ellen has seen evidence of Mary's judgmental attitude before and wonders if she should say or do anything.

Case 6

APFATN

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Yolanda works in a private practice where her pay is based on the number of billable units she completes. Her pay and benefits are excellent. At each weekly staff meeting, all staff are reminded about the minimum number of units to be billed per each patient visit. The practice owner has been heard to say that they should treat patients to the maximum of their benefits stating that "After all, you can always change the goals so there is more therapy to do – it just requires being a little creative." He also reminds the staff that the PT aides are "well trained" and can do a lot of the patient's care to help offset the therapists' load. Yolanda is uncomfortable with this situation but really needs the income and insurance benefits for her family.

Case 7

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Jason has started his own cash-based PT business. He decides to treat himself to a 2-week vacation because he has worked so hard. Jason lets his patients know he is taking a little time off and tells them that if they need anything to call Karen who also has a cash-based PT business across town. Jason went to PT school with Karen and had asked her in passing if she would cover for him some time. When Karen gets a call from one of Jason's patients she is surprised because she did not realize that Jason was out of town. Karen is uncertain what to do about this situation.

Case 8

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Joanie, a PTA working in an outpatient clinic, notices that her best friend's boyfriend is now a patient at the clinic. They exchange pleasantries and speak cordially about their shared acquaintance. The following week the patient is on Joanie's schedule. Upon reviewing the patient's chart Joanie notes that the patient is a recovering drug addict still under the care of a substance abuse clinic as he has relapsed several times. Joanie is shocked and feels sure that her friend does not know this information. Joanie fears for her friend who suffered greatly after losing a brother to a drug overdose. She wonders what actions she can take to protect her friend.

Case 9

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Post-test

Take time now to complete
your post-test.
We will proceed to the next slide
when you are finished.

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Check Your Answers

1. All except d.
2. All
3. a, c, d (b and e are dilemmas)
4. a. Individual, b. Organizational, c. Societal
b. Moral Sensitivity, Moral Judgment, Moral Motivation, Moral Courage
c. Conflict, Dilemma, Distress, Temptation
5. a, b, c
6. All
7. All except d.
8. a and c
9. b
10. 4, 2, 3, 1

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Filing a Complaint

If you believe that a **member of the APTA** has violated the Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy profession complaints may be filed with the:

APTA's Ethics and Judicial Committee at
www.apta.org

OR

the Ethics Committee of APTATN at
www.aptatn.org.

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