

Anatomy of A Consult

1. *INTAKE*

Gather information about the patient, family, and health care providers and how they can be reached.

Be sure to ask what the caller thinks is the ethical issue and how they think an ethics consultation will help. (What's the problem and how can you help?)

Ask about the time frame for the consultation - emergency or more time?

Describe the consultation process to the person requesting the consult so he/she knows what to expect.

2. *INFORMATION GATHERING*

Read the chart - talk to key health care providers - see/talk to the patient if appropriate -

speak with the family or others identified as involved in the case (patient's clergy).

Arrange for a patient care conference if applicable with the family and the team including bedside nurse, social worker, therapists (RRT, RD, PT), chaplain, and others identified in the case.

Be sure to ask whether the family has someone for support like a clergy member that should be invited to any meetings.

3. *FORMULATE A RECOMMENDATION*

Write a response to the request for consultation on a special form developed for that purpose, a consultation sheet, or in the progress notes. If the consultation is ongoing, note what is in progress. When the consultation is complete - write a recommendation.

Communicate the recommendation to the person requesting the consult - to the care team and the patient/family.

4. *FOLLOW-UP AND EVALUATION*

Follow-up on the case to see what happens in the patient's care and if you may offer further assistance.

Send evaluation forms or call persons involved in the consultation - key health care providers and patient/family.

Report the consult to the full ethics committee for evaluation and discussion of the possible need for further intervention such as educational sessions or policy development or revision.