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A. Identify the ethical dilemma – in the form of a question: Do you have a legitimate ethical dilemma? Are principles in conflict? State the specific conflict, then evaluate and apply the specific health care principles that conflict with one another. Without a conflict, there is not ethical dilemma, but merely a right or wrong type of predicament.

Should community clinics perform a gross debridement followed by an adult prophylaxis, even though the patient should receive an SRP? This is a dilemma because it can lead to periodontal abscesses and infection further down the road.

B. Collect information – Information can be specific statements of fact and can come from a variety of sources pertaining to how the conflict began, how it proceeded, and what parties are involved. Information collected is necessary to make a balanced ethical decision

Incomplete calculus removal in a periodontal pocket has been suggested as a cause of an abscess of the periodontium. When this occurs, it is usually thought to be in a site with a very deep probing depth where the calculus deposits are removed only in the most coronal aspects of the pocket near the gingival margin, but the calculus deposits deeper in the pocket are not completely removed because of difficulty of access for instrumentation of the tooth surface. It is theorized that removal of the more coronal calculus deposits allows the gingival margin to heal somewhat and to tighten around the tooth, like a drawstring of a pouch, preventing drainage of bacterial toxins and other waste products from the pocket. Bacteria remaining in the deeper aspects of the periodontal pocket could result in the formation of an abscess of the periodontium.

-Foundations of Periodontics for the Dental Hygienist, Fifth Edition

C. State the options – state the options, is a step by step process or analysis to judge each option and the consequences related to each option. Troubleshoot as many options and their full consequences before proceeding to the next step.

Option 1. Perform a gross debridement followed by a regular adult prophylaxis

Option 2. Have the dentist refer the patient to a clinic that can perform an SRP

Option 3. Perform an SRP to the best of your ability and charge it as a prophylaxis to insurance

D. Apply the ethical principle to the options – show the pros and cons of each option and its consequences discussed in step “C.”

Option 1. Pros- the dentist could do an evaluation after the debridement, the patient is pleased to have their teeth cleaned, it's covered by insurance, it doesn't take as long as an SRP

Cons- possible periodontal abscess. This would be violating the ethical principle of non-maleficence. If you know the patient could form an abscess, you are violating this principle. The gross debridement and prophylaxis are not sufficient for patients that need 4 quadrants of SRP. Patients have the right to autonomy and should have the options explained to them.

Option 2. Pros-the patient will get the SRP they need and have less of a chance for an abscess, which is the ethical principle of beneficence.

Cons- not covered by insurance, the patient probably can't afford it, the patient leaves the office. If the patient doesn't understand the reasoning behind this decision, they may feel it violates the ethical principle of justice and fairness.

Option 3. Pros- the patient is getting the care they need

Cons- illegal to improperly charge a code to insurance. It also violates the principles of veracity and autonomy by not explaining the procedure that is being performed and billed to their insurance, even if it is in the patient's best interest.

E. Make the decision – evaluating the degree of severity regarding the consequences in the con column.

Option 2 is the best option in our opinion, even though it might not be up to us. We came to this decision because it seems to be unfair to the patient to choose the other options. Based on the principles, option 2 follows them closest. The biggest con is that most patients coming to a community clinic are there because they can't afford care at a regular dental office.

F. Implement the decision - Who, What, When, where: without following through and acting on your decision to the ethical dilemma, there will be no resolution for the patient or party affected.

If we were to choose option 2, the dentist would have to agree on our decision and implement it with us. We as hygienists cannot refer patients. If a patient needs an SRP but has no way to pay at a traditional dental office, suggesting a place like LSC's clinic would be a good option. This way they can get the SRP they need at an affordable price, and have less of a chance of getting a periodontal abscess.