

Handbook for Rural Health Care Ethics: A Practical Guide for Professionals

Edited by
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Although many of the case studies contained in the *Handbook* are drawn from actual events, every effort has been made to disguise the identities and the organizations involved.

The *Handbook for Rural Health Care Ethics* provides general ethics information and guidance. Due to complexities and constant changes in the law, exceptions to general principles of law, and variations of state laws, health care professionals should seek specific legal counsel and advice before acting on any legal-related, health care ethics issue.

Additionally, we have sought to ensure that the URLs for external Web sites referred to in the *Handbook* are correct and active at the time of placing this material on the home Web site. However, the editor has no responsibility for the Web sites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

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FOREWORD

This *Handbook for Rural Health Care Ethics: A Practical Guide for Professionals* was created in recognition of the unique nature of rural health care and the need for a thoughtful, practical discussion of rural health care ethics. Very little recognition has been given to the important and complicated ethics conflicts that occur within rural health care, often as a result of rural health care disparities. The idyllic view of the country doctor seldom includes the high level of stress, long hours, and struggle to maintain patient confidentiality and personal space that rural health care providers typically face.

The authors recognize that providing care in rural America can be very rewarding, and the rural community environment presents not only distinct health care delivery challenges but ethical problems for clinicians and administrators of small, rural health care facilities. One of the ethical and practical challenges in this environment is gaining a sufficient understanding to work within the culture of the patient and the community, with its strengths and weaknesses, in a way that does not communicate judgment of the values and the culture itself.

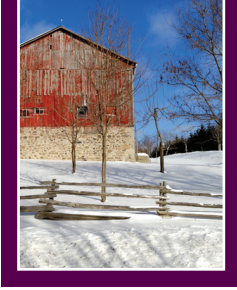
This *Handbook* is designed to be a useful resource for clinicians and administrators of rural health care facilities. The *Handbook* draws on the available research and real-life examples to paint a picture of challenging, yet all-too-familiar ethics conflicts. The professionally diverse group of authors is strongly committed to ensuring high quality and ethically sound health care to every rural patient. Because every author has worked or is working and living in rural America, each brings a rich and unique perspective to their writing. The case-based *Handbook* provides an important framework for managing all-too-common challenges. Additionally, many chapters offer strategies for a proactive, preventive approach to ethics. The editor has encouraged the authors to offer practical approaches for anticipating and setting in place a construct to avert ethics

challenges down the road, because inevitably the basic ethics conflicts will arise again.

The *Handbook* is available via the Internet in order to foster easier and wide-reaching dissemination of this practical resource. The authors hope that rural clinicians and administrators from across the United States are able to take the concepts and suggestions presented here and apply them to better overall patient care and clinician, administrator, and community satisfaction.

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I want to acknowledge the wonderful team working with me on this project — Jamie Pullman-Beaulieu has tirelessly edited the chapters as they have unfolded, served as a project manager, and been a great companion on this long journey. Mary Ann Greene joined Jaime and used her wealth of library research knowledge, skills and reference formatting magic for each chapter. More recently they were partnered with Robyn Mosher and Linnea Spelman who masterfully did the copy editing and page design, respectively, to strengthen the overall readability of each chapter. I also want to thank Aaron Jenkyn for her multi-task assistance. This group comprised a team that became friends in addition to applying their professional talents to the *Handbook* project.

I want to thank the authors of the *Handbook for Rural Health Care Ethics*, a dedicated group of scholars, educators, clinicians, and researchers committed to the importance of health care in rural America.

I want to acknowledge the encouragement from colleagues at Dartmouth Medical School in the development of this *Handbook*. I particularly want to express thanks to colleagues in the Department of Community and Family Medicine and department chair, Dr. Michael Zubkoff, for their insight and support. They have fostered an outstanding environment to produce the next generation of rural primary care physicians.

Additionally, I want to express my appreciation to the National Rural Health Association (NRHA), an organization dedicated to ensuring quality health care for rural America—for their encouragement during my year as a NRHA Leadership Fellow and their recognition of the importance of ethics to rural health care.

Several people have given their expertise and time to review various chapters: Dr. Bette-Jane Crigger, Ms. Ali Renner, and Ms. Paula DiStabile—their feedback has been very helpful.

I also want to acknowledge my colleague and friend of many years, Dr. William Weeks—a recognized researcher and leader in bringing attention to the health care needs of rural residents, especially rural Veterans. Without the Veterans' Rural Initiative at the White River Junction VA Medical Center, which was supported by Dr. Art Sauvigne and Mr. Gary DeGasta, this work could not have been completed.

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WILLIAM NELSON

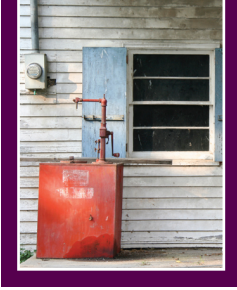


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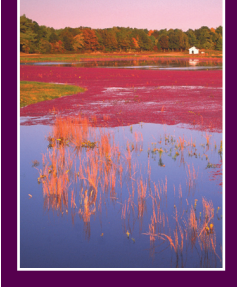
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