

Clinical Ethics & Decision Support

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MORAL RESILIENCE: AN ANTIDOTE TO MORAL DISTRESS

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Ethics conferences



4-7 June 2025, Switzerland

International Conference on
Clinical Ethics and Consultation
(ICCEC)

WWW.CLINIC-ETHICS.ORG

Referrals

Please contact
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Education

To request an education
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Ethical challenges are a common part of clinical practice, and they can sometimes prevent clinicians from acting in alignment with their core values. These moments can lead to moral distress, with emotions such as frustration, sadness, or helplessness. If unaddressed, repeated distress can harm well-being, reduce job satisfaction, and risk burnout.

Moral resilience offers a way to navigate these challenges. Described as the capacity to sustain or restore integrity in response to moral complexity or setbacks, it empowers clinicians to uphold their values while fostering personal and professional growth.

Research conducted by Holtz et al (2017) in healthcare workers identified three core aspects of moral resilience—personal integrity, relational integrity, and buoyancy—help clinicians maintain their ethical commitments. Personal integrity involves staying aligned with core values; relational integrity requires respecting others' beliefs while holding one's own; and buoyancy enables recovery and growth after moral distress.

For example, consider a nurse asked to take daily blood tests from an agitated, elderly patient. Each test causes significant distress for the patient, leaving the nurse feeling conflicted and emotionally strained. The nurse recognises feelings of frustration and helplessness and reflects on the values at stake: ensuring the patient receives appropriate care while minimising unnecessary harm. Engaging with the medical team in an open discussion, they explore whether the frequency of blood tests is essential or if adjustments can better balance patient care with patient comfort. This collaborative approach addresses the moral conflict, aligns actions with shared values, and reinforces a commitment to patient-centered care.

By acknowledging emotions, reflecting on the ethical tensions involved, and seeking solutions through respectful dialogue, clinicians can turn moments of distress into opportunities for growth. This practice strengthens their moral resilience, helping them to navigate future challenges with confidence and clarity. Over time, it also fosters a culture of ethical awareness and mutual support within healthcare teams, enhancing both individual well-being and the quality of care provided.

Holtz H, Heinze K, Rushton C. [Interprofessionals' definitions of moral resilience](#). J Clin Nurs. 2018 Feb;27(3-4):e488-e494. doi: 10.1111/jocn.13989. Epub 2017 Dec 6. PMID: 28771909.

Cynda Hylton Rushton, ["Creating a Culture of Ethical Practice in Health Care Delivery Systems,"](#) Nurses at the Table: Nursing, Ethics, and Health Policy, special report, Hastings Center Report 46, no. 5 (2016): S28-S31. DOI: 10.1002/hast.628.

PODCASTS OF INTEREST

Mojospresso with Ben Crowe - Flexing your AAA Mindset Muscles

Just like we go to the physical gym to get stronger, fitter and faster, we need to go to the mindset gym to work on our mindset muscles. And there's 3 muscles in particular that if regularly trained can bring our perspective to life in the most beautiful way, regardless of what is happening in our lives... Agency, Acceptance, and Appreciation.

The Imperfects - Meet Your Inner Fan

A summary of what performance coach Ben Crowe has learnt from decades of working with elites athletes. This conversation introduces you to a remarkable man who has designed a resource titled the "Academy of Imperfection" which aims to share the mission... "be a good human first...and a great professional second".



CENTER FOR BIOETHICS

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

The Center for Bioethics brings together the rich intellectual resources across Harvard Medical School and Harvard University, along with colleagues and institutions worldwide, to help ensure that scientific progress, medical therapeutics, and health care practices are developed hand-in-hand with reflection upon the profound moral questions raised by advances in the life sciences and biotechnology.

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