Barbara Tuchman, historian and two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, in characterizing the twentieth century, speaks to the nuclear threat and environmental problems, but her central concern points to “the real disruption in public morality.” She stated that the “extent of public immorality making itself so obvious to the average citizen” was a new and very disturbing phenomenon.1 A Rutgers professor reported that of over 6,000 students surveyed from 31 colleges and universities, greater than two thirds admitted to cheating on a major test or assignment at least once while an undergraduate. The presence of an honor code (in 14 of the 31 institutions) apparently had little deterrent effect. Sixty-three percent of law students, 68% of medical students, 71% of engineering students, 76% of students in graduate schools of business, and 56% of students in schools of education admitted to cheating.2 A New York Times/CBS News Poll showed that 55% of Americans believed that the vast majority of corporate executives are dishonest. A Wall Street Journal article noted that one fourth of 671 executives surveyed believed that ethics can impede a successful career.3 Indeed, in observing the behavior of some of our elected officials and in reading about corporate irresponsibility, accounting irregularities, and personal greed in recent headlines, one would logically conclude that there is a disintegration of public and private responsibility for ethical living. Could we be inching closer to an ethical meltdown? What might account for this apparent decline in acceptance of ethical responsibilities? One could speculate that it might be related to growing affluence, the breakup of families, the depiction of violence and dishonesty on TV and in movies (often in the hero or heroine), a shift away from the value of productivity and toward the value of consumption, or any number of other influences in modern day life.1,4

Those of us in professional education typically avoid moralizing to our students or to each other. But ethicists have come to realize that ethics and morals cannot be easily segregated, as they are, in very large measure, the same. John Rawls defined ethics as the pursuit of justice, fair play, and equity.5 Certainly, we realize the importance of including ethical topics in our curricula, as ethical underpinnings are essential for professionals and for leaders. Leaders set the ethical tone in an organization and influence the decisions of followers. Effective leadership is built upon an ethical foundation, because, to paraphrase St. Augustine, the first and last job of a leader is to serve the needs of those being led. Peters and Waterman asserted that the role of leadership is managing the values of an organization, further pointing to the importance of an ethical foundation for our students.6 Gail Sheehy argues that it is important to examine the ethical natures of our leaders, as the fate that they reap will also be our own.7 Our curricular offerings in ethics are, in many instances, relegated to a few lectures in the law course and a hope that the clinical faculty will work a few ethical dilemmas into their teaching cases. In this editorial, I submit that the development of ethical proficiency is a serious responsibility to which we should commit, and that in-depth discussion on this topic within

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the academy is past due. I will offer a few strategies to stimulate thought and discussion.

All of us, in our professional and personal lives face difficult choices. Sometimes we choose between right and wrong, and sometimes we choose between right and right.\(^1\) For most of us, the right vs wrong decisions are less challenging, as the correct choice is readily apparent based on what was taught to us by our parents and teachers early in our lives. We know it is wrong to lie on our tax forms, to not report our vacation leave to our employers, to falsify research data, to lie under oath, to illegally sell cocaine, to misrepresent facts to our insurance company, to show up 2 hours late for an appointment without a good reason, and to hire into a tenure-track position a faculty member who does not have the appropriate educational background to be successful and for whom adequate resources are not in place to assist in his/her success.

It is the right vs right decisions that are more challenging, as they pit our values against each other and require ethical fitness, which, like physical fitness, must be methodically developed over time through consistent and repetitive application. According to Kidder\(^1\) these right vs right choices generally fit into 1 or more of 4 paradigms: (1) truth vs loyalty, (2) individual vs community, (3) short-term vs long-term, and (4) justice vs mercy. A few such right vs right dilemmas that pharmacists and educators face include:

- It is right to relieve suffering at the end of life and to assist the terminally ill who are determined to leave the world with dignity, and it is right to prolong life using all the humane measures available to us.
- It is right to be absolutely truthful in writing letters of recommendation for friends and colleagues, and it is right to be loyal and supportive of these individuals to help them to advance in their profession.
- It is right to ration scarce life-saving health care resources so that they can be made available to patients who need them most, and it is right not to deny essential health care resources to any patient who needs them.
- It is right to apply promotion and tenure criteria objectively and faithfully in all circumstances, and it is right to be loyal to and supportive of faculty friends as they undergo scrutiny by tenure and promotion committees.
- It is right to institute post-tenure review systems to evaluate and encourage continued productivity of tenured faculty and to provide accountability to the institution and taxpayers, and it is right to protect faculty and the institution from needless bureaucratic processes that seldom result in any real change and that require the institution to expend precious time and resources on the development of under-productive faculty instead of faculty in greater need or with greater potential.
- It is right to commit long hours to our teaching, our discipline, and our profession to ensure our success in meeting the needs of our constituents and providing for our families, and it is right to spend time at home nurturing our children and volunteering to meet community needs.
- It is right to condemn plagiarism and to take swift and decisive action against those who plagiarize, and it is right to show mercy to those who make an error in judgment, recognize their error, and are genuinely remorseful.

In ethical decision making, we cannot come down on both sides of rightness in these and other right vs right dilemmas. Indeed, what is the role of pharmacists in assisted suicide, rationing of limited health care resources, and provision of pharmaceutical care to patients seeking abortions? How do pharmacists who are committed to evidence-based medicine reconcile recommending alternative medicines with little or no evidence supporting efficacy, safety, purity, or consistency of potency? What are the ethical issues surrounding the creation of designer babies and cloned humans? What tools and tests do we need to have at our disposal to assist us in making the right
choices and learning from our choices through reflection?

Kidder\(^1\) advises that to resolve ethical dilemmas, one must select the choice that is “nearest right for the circumstances.” He proposes the application of 3 ethical principles to assist in making the best choice:

- **Ends-based thinking:** Do whatever produces the greatest good for the greatest number.
- **Rule-based thinking:** Do whatever could/should rightfully become the universal standard for everyone to obey.
- **Care-based thinking:** Do whatever you would like others to do to you.

Clearly, application of these seemingly simplistic principles is much more complex than might appear on the surface. Usually more than one principle applies to any ethical dilemma, and they can be applied differently depending on whose perspective the analysis is based on. These principles are to be used as part of a reasoning process; they don’t provide a magical answer. They are simply offered as principles to guide our analysis of ethical dilemmas.

**Suggested Strategies to Foster Ethical Decision Making in Pharmacy Colleges**

I offer the following strategies for educators to help foster abilities in ethical decision making. These recommendations must be further developed and expanded upon through robust discussions by faculty at professional and discipline-specific meetings and in faculty meetings and retreats.

- Faculty should begin to educate themselves about how ethical dilemmas are identified and resolved. Unfortunately, most pharmacy faculty have had little or no formal education on this topic. A good place to start is by seeking out resources that are available from leadership and ethics centers and institutes on the Internet. These might include (among many others):
  - The James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland (www.academy.umd.edu/)
  - The Institute of Global Ethics in Camden, Maine (www.globalethics.org/)

In addition, excellent readings are available in the library and the bookstore. As a starting place, I would recommend Rushworth M. Kidder’s book entitled, *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living.*\(^1\)

- Clearly, there should be an identifiable portion of the curriculum which, using active learning approaches, is dedicated to raising student awareness of the meaning and importance of ethics in our lives and to teaching the principles and paradigms that are useful in making right vs right choices.
- This material should be reinforced throughout the curriculum using examples of ethical dilemmas that arise in the context of the discipline or material being taught.
- We should develop ways to measure ethical fitness in our students as a mechanism to assess our effectiveness in fostering this ability.
- We should invite speakers who are experts in the broad field of ethics to assist faculty and students in continuing their growth in ethical decision making.
- With broad-based input from faculty, staff, and students, we should develop values statements as a component of our strategic plans to guide our schools in pursuit of all our missions. As such, these shared values should inform what we do day by day, and can also be helpful to us in building consensus around important issues.
- We should define ethics and ethical behavior within our institutions, our profession, and our discipline.
- We should identify and recognize ethical behaviors, and we should identify unethical behavior and deal with it fairly and honestly.

The reader may be left wondering how the author of this editorial managed to discuss the importance of fostering ethical decision making without mentioning the case of the Kansas City pharmacist who was indicted for apparently intentionally com-
pounding and dispensing subtherapeutic chemother-apy products to cancer patients. Pharmacists throughout the world reacted with horror and revulsion that such an act to seal the fate of so many patients could occur and that it could be committed by a pharmacist, a member of the second most trusted profession. Of course, he has now been convicted and sentenced. Obviously, this is a case of a sadistic right vs wrong decision, seemingly motivated by unadulterated greed. I believe this incident is an aberration, and not a case of failure of pharmacy education. If I did not believe so, I could not go to work tomorrow. It is, however, an extreme example of a deplorable, unethical, immoral, unbelievably cruel, and illegal choice that was made by a pharmacist.

We find ourselves in a complex world replete with ethical temptations (right vs wrong dilemmas) and a seemingly limitless number of extremely difficult right vs right choices to be made in our personal and professional lives. I believe we have a responsibility to move our institutions in such a way that we assist our students and our faculty in their ethical decision making by providing the necessary grounding, paradigms, and principles to approach thorny ethical issues. We must equip our students and ourselves with an ability to recognize ethical challenges and an ability not only to choose right, but which right, as professionals, as leaders, and as citizens. The winners will be not only our profession and our patients, but humankind, be cause our ethical principles and values dictate how we engage with and participate in our world. The place to start is with robust discussion among our faculty and students. It is my hope that we will embrace these responsibilities as never before.

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References


