

# Study Unit 5

## Ethical issues and Dilemmas in Mental health outreach work

### Ethical issues and Dilemmas in Mental health outreach work Outline

- What are Ethics?
- Ethical codes

### Study Unit Duration

This Study Session requires a 2 hours of formal study time.

You may spend an additional 1 hours for revision



### Preamble

The issue of patients' rights to health care most especially mental healthcare is very important. Most times, the rights of people with mental illness or mental disturbances, who are disproportionately vulnerable, can be infringed upon in health care contexts either directly or indirectly. Thus, a more nuanced approach to the issue is required, in that 'special' responsibilities falls upon healthcare providers towards this vulnerable group.

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### Learning Outcomes of Study Unit 5

Upon completion of this study unit, you should be able to:

- 5.1 Explain the need for Ethics in mental health care
  - 5.2 Be able to explain the need for ethics in mental health outreach work.
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## 5.1 What are Ethics?

Values and principles that address questions of what is good or bad in human affairs. Ethics searches for reasons for acting or refraining from acting; for approving or not approving conduct; for believing or denying something about virtuous or vicious conduct or good or evil rules.

In other words Ethics is one's moral stance, one's moral principles they carry. When they ask, "What are your ethics?" they typically mean "*What are your moral principles?*" I.e., what *kind* of person are you? Are you a *good* or *bad* person?

## 5.2 Ethical codes

In mental health profession ethical codes (ethical guidance) aims to present acceptable standards of practice. Sometimes these are very obvious sometimes there are dilemmas.

The clearest thing is to always maintain the duty of care to those that you are undertaking to help (duty of care).

In this module we look at four principles that you must maintain in your mental health outreach work.

- ❖ Training and competence
- ❖ Autonomy of the people being helped
- ❖ Confidentiality

### Training and competence

Always ensure that you have the competence to assess the needs of the people you are looking to support and then the ability to provide the support they need.

And both the assessment of needs and the delivery of the support should be done with respect for those being supported. This respect enables the outreach worker to carefully listen and understand the perspectives of the person they are working with.

This can be achieved by your readiness to attend trainings and development opportunities such as this one and continue to update your knowledge and understanding.



How do you plan to maintain your continued development in the field of mental health support?

### **Client Autonomy**

This refers to the ability (right) of the people you are working this to make their choices in accordance of what their understanding of what works best for them. These choices apply equally before and during your relationship with them.

This principle is particularly crucial when the people you are working with have a different value system to yours, for example in situations of cultural or religious differences. You should strive to avoid imposing your own values on your clients.



How would you address a situation where you are working with someone whose religious beliefs you do not agree with?

It is highly unethical to wrongly assess people as needing help or deny them help on the basis of judgements determined by cultural, race, gender and any other characteristics.

### **Confidentiality**

When we try to help people by providing mental health support we must remember that we are often dealing with material that is often not known to other people, even close family members at times. It is therefore crucial to maintain at most trust in your commitment to maintain confidentiality.

However, there are ethical responsibilities that make total confidentiality, there are ethical and legal issues that govern the boundaries of confidentiality. The following are examples of situations where you may not be in a position to maintain confidentiality.

- Where there is risk to another person (e.g. sexual abuse)
- Where there is risk of harm to the person you are working with (e.g. suicide)
- Where there is concerns with criminality
- Information that is required for medical care needs

It is best to have this discussion regarding confidentiality at the start of the work you are undertaking and allow the person you are working with to make the considerations.



How will you describe the concept of confidentiality to the people you intend to work?

It is crucial to maintain high standards in order to gain the confidence of the people you are working with and this is maintained by your commitments to ethical standards.