

Ethical issues in dementia care
Julian C Hughes and Clive Baldwin
Jessica Kingsley
London
2006

There are always difficult questions and decisions experienced and made by practitioners with people who have dementia on a regular basis. Any decision is usually informed by value judgements on what it is felt to be the right or wrong course of action.

According to the authors, moral theories give practitioners means of understanding about what might constitute a good thing and what might constitute a bad one. They can offer a structure for ethical decisions which practitioners have to make regularly. The application of moral theories can be a challenge in "the busy world of dementia care" (Pg16). The authors suggest that one method of overcoming the problem of choosing the right moral theory is "principlism" which is based on the following principles:

- Enabling people to decide what they want to happen or be done to them
- Doing good to them
- Avoiding harm to them
- Treating them fairly and equally

Having introduced principlism, the authors contend that "moral theories and principles do not provide neat and tidy answers. Actually, they can sometimes make matters more complicated" (Pg 24). They suggest the use of an informed conscience which is acquired through education and upbringing. Subsequent chapters consider thoroughly the following relevant themes:

- Consent and capacity to treatment
- Emphatic relationships
- Good quality of life and end of life
- Patterns of decision making process in practice

The chapters are clearly and sensitively written with effective use of case scenarios and research studies to inform the argument presented by the authors. A little more consideration to the needs of people with dementia and their carers from different religious and cultural backgrounds will be useful in a future edition.

This book will be of great value to all practitioners who are confronted with ethically related questions on a regular basis.