# TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF RISK

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## INTRODUCTION

Pharmacists constantly encounter situations which lead to a dilemma regarding the best possible outcome for the patient. When faced with these situations, pharmacists often ask themselves "What should I do?" There is no perfect answer to this question, but considering in detail the reasoning used within various scenarios would enable one to decide which ethical theory to adopt to guide decisions in difficult situations.[1] Pharmacists, like other healthcare professionals, face ethical problems sometime during their career and should be knowledgeable on how to act in concordance with their professional code of conduct.

## AIMS

This research aims to propose different approaches that pharmacists can take prior to deciding what action they are going to take based on philosophical principles and theories and the risk associated with taking that decision.

## METHOD

An extensive literature review was conducted to evaluate the different areas of philosophy related to morality and decision-making processes, after which, potential decisions taken by pharmacists were evaluated and assessed by different philosophical approaches.

## RESULTS

Two approaches can be considered to answer the question, namely, the utilitarian approach and the deontological approach (Figure 1). The utilitarian approach states that an action is right if it promotes happiness and well-being in the majority of the population.[2,3] The deontology approach states that an action is right or wrong depending on the inherent nature of the action, irrespective of its consequences.[4]

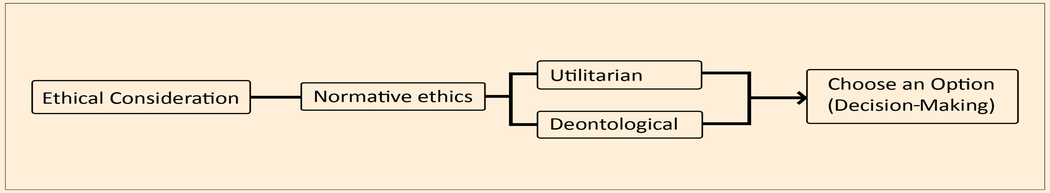


Figure 1: The approaches that guide decision-making

For example, if the pharmacist decides to dispense a valid, legal prescription for the oral contraceptive pill irrespective of his/her beliefs, the stakeholders involved, namely the pharmacy, the drug manufacturing company, the prescribing physician and the patient are going to benefit and only the pharmacist is going to be inconvenienced. This decision follows the utilitarian approach.

If the pharmacist decides not to dispense the prescription because s/he thinks that this action is contradicting the purpose of the pharmaceutical profession that of respect of human life, then this decision follows the deontological approach.

Reasoning logically is the foundation that enables one to decide upon ethical decisions. However, at times, fallacious logical reasoning can lead to negative ethical judgement. Therefore, when engaged in reasoning, individuals, and in this case, pharmacists, must ensure they are not reasoning fallaciously. By fallacies, we mean logical errors in reasoning, which can be either intentional or unintentional.[5]

## CONCLUSION

Approaches like utilitarianism and deontology guide decision-making and help in minimising risks involved in various pharmaceutical scenarios. Ethical decision-making is also based on reasoning, which can at times be fallacious, therefore, such theories make pharmacists more aware of the ethics of their daily decision-making activities.

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