

Medical ethicists working in hospitals need to have standards

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A Queen's University professor is helping standardize practices for healthcare ethicists who consult and give guidance on medical ethics issues to doctors, nurses and patients across the country.

"It's time for healthcare [ethicists](#) to have some formal practice guidelines, a governing code of [ethics](#), and uniform education and certification standards," says Cheryl Cline, Director of the Office of [Bioethics](#) in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Clinical Ethicist at Kingston General Hospital. "Our job is to provide Canadian patients and their families with high quality ethics services and formal guidelines will help us achieve this."

Dr. Cline is Co-Chair of Practicing Healthcare Ethicists Exploring Professionalization (PHEEP), a national organization that has been spearheading the campaign for two years.

The field of healthcare ethics practice is relatively new. The field has grown exponentially over the last 20 years and many hospitals now have ethicists on staff. Yet, unlike other professionals who work in healthcare, the qualifications of ethicists vary across Canada and there is no certification process.

"This is the natural evolution of a young field. People feel we've gotten to the stage where there are some fairly standard practices being followed informally, and we would like to codify these as the next step in the professionalization of ethicists in Canada," says Dr. Cline. "And

we are doing this in typical Canadian fashion. Not everyone agrees with healthcare ethicists becoming a formal profession so we are consulting as widely as possible."

PHEEP is currently hosting a two-day national conference funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in Halifax to decide on the field's guiding principles and develop a process for the creation of standards. Dr. Cline and her colleagues hope to have everything in place within a year.

Provided by Queen's University

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