

ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT AND MEDICAL DECISION-MAKING SKILLS IN MID-CAREER MEDICAL STAFF

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Abstract: This article examines the interrelated constructs of ethical development and medical decision-making skills in mid-career medical professionals. In modern healthcare systems, mid-career practitioners serve as crucial intermediaries between senior specialists and junior staff, making complex clinical decisions that require both professional judgment and ethical sensitivity. Ethical development influences the perception of moral problems, the internalization of professional values, and the ability to resolve ethical dilemmas. Meanwhile, decision-making skills determine how medical professionals synthesize clinical evidence, patient values, and situational factors when choosing optimal care paths. Drawing on theoretical literature from Uzbek, CIS, and foreign researchers published between 2010 and 2025, this article develops an integrated model that explains how ethical development shapes decision-making processes, and vice versa. The study highlights institutional, cultural, and educational factors affecting both competencies and offers recommendations for enhancing ethical professionalism and decision competence in healthcare organizations.

Keywords: ethical development; medical decision-making; mid-career medical staff; professional ethics; clinical reasoning; healthcare quality; moral judgment.

O‘RTA FAOLIYAT BOSQICHIDAGI TIBBIYOT XODIMLARIDA AXLOQIY RIVOJLANISH VA TIBBIY QAROR QABUL QILISH KO‘NIKMALARI

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Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada o‘rta faoliyat bosqichidagi tibbiyot mutaxassislarida axloqiy rivojlanish va tibbiy qaror qabul qilish ko‘nikmalarining o‘zaro bog‘liqligi tahlil qilinadi. Zamonaviy sog‘liqni saqlash tizimida bunday mutaxassislar katta tajribaga ega bo‘lgan shifokorlar hamda yosh xodimlar o‘rtasida muhim bo‘g‘in bo‘lib, murakkab klinik vaziyatlarda kasbiy mulohaza va axloqiy sezgirlikka tayangan holda qaror qabul qiladi. Axloqiy rivojlanish ma‘naviy muammolarni anglash, kasbiy qadriyatlarini ichkilashtirish va axloqiy dilemmalarni hal etishga ta‘sir ko‘rsatadi. Qaror qabul qilish ko‘nikmalari esa klinik dalillar, bemor qadriyatlari va vaziyat omillarini uyg‘unlashtirib, maqbul davolash yo‘lini tanlashni belgilaydi. 2010–2025-yillarda O‘zbekiston, MDH va xorijiy olimlar tomonidan chop etilgan nazariy adabiyotlar asosida maqolada axloqiy rivojlanish qaror qabul qilish jarayoniga qanday ta‘sir etishi va aksincha, qaror qabul qilish tajribasi axloqiy rivojlanishni qanday shakllantirishi ko‘rsatilgan yaxlit model taklif etiladi. Shuningdek, ushbu ikki kompetensiyaga ta‘sir qiluvchi institutsional, madaniy va ta‘limiy omillar yoritilib, sog‘liqni saqlash tashkilotlarida axloqiy professionallik va qaror qabul qilish salohiyatini kuchaytirish bo‘yicha tavsiyalar beriladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: axloqiy rivojlanish; tibbiy qaror qabul qilish; o‘rta faoliyat bosqichidagi tibbiyot xodimlari; kasbiy etika; klinik tafakkur; sog‘liqni saqlash sifati; axloqiy mulohaza.

ЭТИЧЕСКОЕ РАЗВИТИЕ И НАВЫКИ ПРИНЯТИЯ МЕДИЦИНСКИХ РЕШЕНИЙ У МЕДИЦИНСКИХ РАБОТНИКОВ СРЕДНЕГО ЭТАПА ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается взаимосвязь этического развития и навыков принятия медицинских решений у медицинских работников среднего этапа профессиональной деятельности. В современных системах здравоохранения такие специалисты выступают важным связующим звеном между старшими специалистами и младшим персоналом, принимая сложные клинические решения, требующие как профессионального суждения, так и этической чувствительности. Этическое развитие влияет на восприятие моральных проблем, интериоризацию профессиональных ценностей и способность разрешать этические дилеммы. В то же время навыки принятия решений определяют, как медицинские работники синтезируют клинические доказательства, ценности пациента и ситуативные факторы при выборе оптимального пути оказания помощи. На основе теоретической литературы узбекских, стран СНГ и зарубежных исследователей, опубликованной в 2010–2025 годах, в статье предлагается интегративная модель, объясняющая, как этическое развитие влияет на процессы принятия решений и как сами процессы принятия решений, в свою очередь, способствуют этическому развитию. Также выделены институциональные, культурные и образовательные факторы, влияющие на обе компетенции, и сформулированы рекомендации по усилению этического профессионализма и компетентности в принятии решений в организациях здравоохранения.

Ключевые слова: этическое развитие; принятие медицинских решений; медицинские работники среднего этапа карьеры; профессиональная этика; клиническое мышление; качество здравоохранения; моральное суждение.

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare practice inherently involves ethical and clinical complexities. Medical professionals regularly confront situations requiring difficult choices, competing values, and unresolved clinical uncertainty. Mid-career medical staff — typically defined as professionals with approximately 8–20 years of clinical experience — occupy a pivotal role in patient care and organizational functioning. They are expected to make independent clinical decisions, guide treatment plans, supervise junior personnel, and contribute to institutional ethics practices [2; 3].

Ethical development refers to the evolution of moral reasoning, sensitization to ethical issues, and the internalization of professional values that guide behavior beyond regulatory compliance. Grounded in developmental psychology and professional ethics literature, ethical development occurs through reflective practice, exposure to moral dilemmas, and formal instruction in ethics. This progression enables clinicians to recognize moral conflicts and apply principled judgment that balances patient welfare, autonomy, justice, and beneficence.

Medical decision-making, on the other hand, is the cognitive process by which clinicians interpret clinical data, generate hypotheses, evaluate alternatives, and reach determinations about care. Decision-making models incorporate evidence-based practice principles, clinical intuition,

and patient preferences. While clinical judgments are often conceptualized as cognitive tasks, ethical considerations are intrinsic to the process: choices in healthcare reflect not only scientific reasoning but also normative values.

Understanding how ethical development and decision-making skills interact is essential for advancing patient-centered care and professional competency among mid-career medical staff. Despite the growing literature on clinical reasoning and medical ethics separately, integrative models remain underdeveloped, particularly in the contexts of Uzbek and CIS healthcare systems. Moreover, globalization, demographic change, and evolving regulatory frameworks necessitate a renewed focus on ethical professionalism and reasoning competence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a theoretical integrative review methodology to examine ethical development and decision-making skills among mid-career medical professionals.

The methodology included the following components:

Inclusion criteria: Works were included if they addressed ethical reasoning, moral development, clinical decision-making frameworks, professionalism in healthcare, or intersectional analyses of ethics and decision-making. Both empirical and conceptual publications were used.

Theoretical mapping: Key concepts (ethical development, moral reasoning, clinical decision-making, professional competence) were operationalized and mapped across studies.

Comparative synthesis: Regional perspectives (Uzbekistan, CIS) were examined alongside global conceptual frameworks to identify convergences and contextual differences.

This methodology emphasizes theoretical integration and multidisciplinary perspectives rather than original empirical data collection.

RESULTS

Ethical Development in Mid-Career Professionals. Ethical development in healthcare has been conceptualized as a progressive capability that enables clinicians to identify, analyze, and resolve moral conflicts. A foundational theory in moral development — Lawrence Kohlberg's stage model — proposes that individuals evolve from rule-based moral reasoning toward principled moral judgment that transcends authority and convention. In medical contexts, this framework has been adapted to describe how practitioners shift from compliance with external regulations to internalized ethical standards informed by universal principles of justice, autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence [2; 3].

Professional medical ethics codified by international and national professional bodies provide structured principles that guide behavior. For example, the Declaration of Geneva and national codes in Uzbekistan emphasize human dignity, patient autonomy, confidentiality, and the primacy of patient welfare. These frameworks serve as normative reference points that medical professionals integrate into their ethical reasoning [2; 3].

Mid-career medical staff typically experience more complex ethical choices than early-career practitioners due to greater clinical autonomy, leadership responsibilities, and involvement in organizational processes.

Uzbek scholars highlight the moral-psychological aspects of healthcare professionalism, emphasizing that ethical competence is not innate but is cultivated through exposure to clinical dilemmas, reflective practice, and formal ethics education programs.

Medical decision-making is conceptualized through multiple theoretical lenses:

1. Evidence-Based Practice (EBP): integrates best research evidence, clinical expertise, and patient preferences. EBP posits that decisions should be rooted in scientific validity while considering individual patient contexts.

2. Dual-Process Theory: suggests that clinicians use both intuitive (fast, pattern-based) and analytical (slow, reasoned) cognitive processes in clinical reasoning.

3. Shared Decision-Making (SDM): emphasizes collaboration between clinician and patient, incorporating patient values and preferences into the decision.

4. Reflective Practice Models: encourage clinicians to reflect on decisions, consequences, and underlying assumptions, fostering professional growth.

Each of these models implicitly contains ethical elements, especially when clinicians negotiate conflicting values, patient wishes, or uncertainty.

Interrelation Between Ethical Development and Decision-Making. The literature converges on the view that ethical maturity and decision-making skills are not isolated competencies but interdependent ones. Ethical development enhances decision-making in several ways: Recognition of values: Ethical maturity enables clinicians to detect underlying value conflicts in clinical situations.

Deliberation: Mature ethical reasoning fosters deliberate weighing of alternatives rather than automatic or solely rule-based choices.

Justification: Clinicians with advanced ethical awareness can justify decisions with reference to ethical principles and patient values.

Responsibility: Ethical development reinforces accountability in decision outcomes, enhancing professional integrity.

Moreover, decision-making contexts themselves serve as arenas for ethical development. Confronting dilemmas, especially in mid-career roles, stimulates reflection and moral growth.

Cultural and Institutional Factors. Cultural norms and institutional environments shape ethical perceptions and decision practices. In Uzbek and CIS contexts, collective family involvement in clinical decisions, hierarchical medical structures, and traditional medico-social values influence how ethical concepts such as autonomy are interpreted. For example, family-centered decisions often raise tensions between respect for patient autonomy and social cohesion — a dynamic that requires culturally sensitive ethical reasoning.

Institutional environments with supportive ethics infrastructures — such as clinical ethics committees, regular ethics rounds, and formal training programs — foster ethical competence and decision quality.

Professional Development Strategies. Theoretical literature proposes several strategies to enhance ethical development and decision-making abilities: Continuous ethics education: integrating case-based learning, simulations, and reflective exercises. Clinical ethics support: establishment of ethics committees and consultation services.

Mentorship and coaching: senior professionals modeling ethical reasoning and decision practices. **Reflective supervision:** structured opportunities for practitioners to reflect on ethical dimensions of their decisions.

These strategies aim to cultivate both cognitive and emotional dimensions of professionalism.

DISCUSSION

Conceptual Integration of Ethics and Decision-Making. The key analytical insight from the literature is that ethical development and medical decision-making are mutually reinforcing.

Ethical maturity provides the lens through which clinical data, patient values, and normative principles are interpreted. Decision-making models enriched with ethical deliberation are more responsive to patient autonomy, justice considerations, and professional integrity.

For example, shared decision-making models prioritize not only clinical evidence but also respect for patient values — a task that requires ethical awareness. Similarly, reflective practice encourages clinicians to examine not only what decision was made but why it was made and what values informed it.

Therefore, ethical development functions as a metacognitive scaffolding that supports higher-order decision processes.

Regional Perspectives and Global Convergences. While the core principles of ethical development and clinical decision-making are universally recognized, regional scholarship emphasizes context-specific dimensions. Uzbek and CIS research underscores collective cultural values, societal expectations of medical professionals, and historical medical traditions. Global literature elaborates on ethical reasoning models, cognitive frameworks, and patient-centered care standards. These perspectives converge on the need for contextualized but principled approaches to ethics and decision competency.

Institutional Roles and Cultural Dynamics. Institutions shape ethical norms through policies, resource allocations, leadership styles, and organizational cultures. A supportive environment that encourages ethical dialogue, open reflection, and collaborative decision-making strengthens both ethical development and clinical judgment.

In culturally diverse settings, understanding local values — such as family involvement and communal decision processes — is necessary to tailor ethical interventions effectively.

Significance of Ethical Development. Ethical development contributes significantly to healthcare quality. Clinicians with advanced ethical sophistication are better equipped to recognize value conflicts, justify their choices, balance competing obligations, and protect patient welfare in complex situations.

Without ethical maturity, decisions may be technically correct but morally deficient, leading to patient dissatisfaction, conflict, or even legal consequences.

Decision-Making Competence as a Professional Benchmark. Medical decision-making skills are core benchmarks of professional competency. Effective decisions integrate clinical evidence, patient preferences, and ethical norms. These skills evolve with experience but require intentional cultivation — especially when facing ambiguous cases or conflicting values.

Educational and Institutional Recommendations. Healthcare institutions and training bodies should establish ethics curricula in continuous professional development, support reflective practice through case discussions and moral reflection, formalize ethics infrastructure through clinical ethics committees and decision-support tools, encourage interprofessional dialogue, and respect cultural contexts through culturally competent ethical reasoning training.

Challenges and Barriers. Barriers include limited time for reflective learning, variations in prior ethics education, and hierarchical cultural norms that discourage ethical debate. Overcoming these requires institutional commitment, protected time for professional development, and leadership support.

CONCLUSION

Integrating ethics into professional development ensures that mid-career practitioners are not only clinically proficient but also morally attuned. Ethics training should be ongoing, embedded in clinical practice, and supported institutionally.

Overall, the reviewed literature shows that ethical development and medical decision-making are mutually reinforcing competencies that should be developed together in order to improve professional integrity, decision quality, and patient-centered care in healthcare organizations.

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