

A Brief Business Case for Ethics

A strong ethics program can reap many concrete benefits for a health care organization, from increasing patient satisfaction, to improving employee morale, to conserving resources and saving costs. Here's some of the evidence that doing the right thing is also doing the smart thing:

- **Increasing patient satisfaction.** When organizations support ethical health care practices—for example, by encouraging clinicians to actively involve patients in decisions about their health care—patients do better clinically and say they're more satisfied with the care they receive.[1–3]
- **Improving employee morale.** Organizations that support ethical decision making—especially organizations whose ethics programs focus on achieving high standards instead of simply complying with policy or law[4]—can expect to have happier, more dedicated employees.[5–7]
- **Enhancing productivity.** A strong corporate ethics culture can improve not only employee morale but also performance, and help to improve an organization's efficiency and productivity.[8–10] An effective ethics program also makes it easier to recruit and retain quality staff.[11]
- **Conserving resources/avoiding costs.** Effective ethics programs have been shown to improve quality of care and reduce length of stay and cost.[12] Supporting patients' rights to forgo life-sustaining treatment meets an important ethical standard, and at the same time can have the effect of avoiding costs.[13–15]
- **Improving accreditation reviews.** As of 2006, the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations includes 24 standards explicitly pertaining to ethics, patient rights, and organizational responsibilities (RI.1–RI.3.1). A strong ethics program can help ensure that the organization meets or exceeds those standards.
- **Reducing ethics violations.** VA's Inspector General has identified deficiencies relating to patient privacy and confidentiality, advance directives, withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment, and informed consent.[16] An effective ethics program can help address such deficiencies in ethics quality. And in health care as in the business world, an effective ethics program can help prevent the sort of practices that can lead to findings of material weakness, or even sanctions or fines, and damage an organization's reputation.[17]
- **Reducing risk of lawsuits.** Organizations that make strong commitments to ethical health care practices, such as being honest with patients, can reduce the risk of litigation and liability.[18–20]
- **Sustaining corporate integrity.** Ambiguity about values and priorities is one of the major sources of corporate deviance.[21] Making ethics a clear priority in corporate culture helps to ensure good business practices throughout the organization.
- **Safeguarding the organization's future.** Lack of an effective ethics program can seriously jeopardize an organization's reputation and even its survival.[22] Creating structures and processes by which an organization can hold itself accountable to its core values and to ethical practices is an investment in the organization's future.

References

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