

PREFACE

Ethics at Work: Issues and Insights Across Employment Settings

The beginning of my Clinical Fellowship happened to be the same year that the Watergate scandal was exposed, and public sentiment had become sensitive to and enlightened by the need to ensure ethical conduct at all levels of society. I was working for a well-known, not-for-profit agency. I had just moved to the city where the job was located and did not yet own a car. On my first day as a speech-language pathologist, the director of the facility offered to drive me home. Along the way, he pointed to a gated community and informed me that this was an area in which individuals of certain ethnic backgrounds (including my own) were not permitted. On the second day, he stopped at a bar. Although he invited me to join him, I waited in the car. That night, I purchased my first car, and shortly thereafter I contacted the national association and eventually resigned from my position. My boss was twice my age, had served in his position for 20 years, and had an authoritarian demeanor. In my opinion, his actions violated accepted practices. I felt the balance of power was unequal. I perceived discriminating views and felt his actions devalued the organization and challenged my personal and professional integrity. I considered whether this was an example of an ethical dilemma, a legal issue, an interpersonal communication problem, or just “one of those things that happens.” I felt then, and to some degree still do, that the answers to these questions are controversial, complicated, and confusing. Upon reflection, I recognize that early in my career I learned that ethical predicaments can appear at any time, in any setting, and can

pose personal and professional challenges. I also realized that, as complex as the topic of ethics in the workplace is, we all have the training and skills necessary to assist us in making sound, ethical choices. Waggoner comments, “In a purely technical sense, all professionals are trained or educated to solve problems. The primary motivation to do so derives from a commitment to serve and an obligation to maintain professional integrity in situations involving co-workers, clients, employers, and, ultimately, society itself. Thus it is critical that professionals maintain a sensitivity to the need for strong moral and ethical judgment that translates into ‘principled professional conduct.’”¹ The process of “thinking ethically” is a 24/7 endeavor. Ethics is not something that gets turned on or off when we arrive at or leave our workplaces. How our decisions are influenced by or intersect with the policies, practices, and procedures of various employment settings is examined in this *Seminars* issue.

In this time of extensive access to information, we are fortunate to have many resources from which to draw. It is my hope that readers will find the articles herein useful to their clinical decision making. They highlight the intricacy of our work with different individuals across settings. The authors examine the utility of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Code of Ethics across multiple decision-making frameworks and evidence from best practices, and they encourage and support readers in their efforts to ensure that the workplace fosters an environment of

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trust, compassion, and ethical integrity. I believe that we all share a common desire to provide the best possible care to those we serve and respectful regard for those in our profession. This begins in the workplace and is manifested through our professional conduct. In her forward to the 2003 *Seminars* issue on Ethics, Helm-Estabrooks comments on the timeliness of that particular issue, which was published at the same time as the initiation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).² Eight years later, the need and desire for ethical guidance still resonate with those in our profession, which attests to the value of keeping ethics at the forefront of our actions.

Since my Clinical Fellowship year, I have cotaught ethics coursework with a philosophy colleague, coedited a text on ethics education, and served on and chaired the ASHA Board of Ethics. It was in this last role that I came to appreciate the struggles and triumphs that members across work settings face. I also recognized the important directives found in the Code of Ethics. This code is at the heart of our work, regardless of where, and when, that work occurs.

I want to thank Nan Ratner, Editor-in-Chief, for the opportunity to edit and write about a topic of such importance to me and to the profession to which I have committed my

life's work. I also wish to express my deepest and heartfelt gratitude to Clare Sabatini and Jessica Halley, two intelligent, talented, and kind young women who read and assisted with the editing of all of the articles and whose comments and insightful critiques exceeded what I had any right to expect. I acknowledge the many authors and colleagues for their scholarship and personal engagement. Their contributions were constant reminders of the joy and value of ethics. Finally, I thank the future readers of these articles for investing in the traditions of ethical and social responsibility. I would like to dedicate this issue to my husband, Robert Chabon, for his continued nurturance of my mind and soul, and in grateful memory of my parents, Irving and Rosalind Steinberg.

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Guest Editor

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