Using Systematic Reviews to inform Ethical Decision-Making

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While systematic reviews are widely used to inform clinical practice, there are no examples of how systematic reviews can be utilized to inform ethical decision-making. Encountering ethical dilemmas is part of clinical culture since there is often a clash between and amongst ethical principles where the patient may not always have a voice (Nelson, 2015). Ethical decision-making includes a process of steps examining a dilemma within a patient-centered context and addressing the dilemma with the expectation of the best possible outcome. The steps in ethical decision-making involve gathering data from a variety of sources, examining stakeholders and potential courses of action before deciding on which course of action is ultimately the best for an individual case (Mallari & Tariman, 2017). While there are many ethical decision-making frameworks and models, there are none that include weighing evidence from a systematic review to inform ethical clinical decision-making. Systematic reviews provide a rich source of information that can be used to help guide the ethical decision-making process. Therefore, it is important to consider incorporating knowledge synthesis from systematic reviews into the ethical decision-making process.

The purpose of this presentation is to review the basic steps of ethical decision-making and demonstrate how systematic reviews can be used effectively to inform ethical decision-making. Exemplars for selecting and applying systematic reviews in both teaching and practice related to ethical decision-making will be provided and discussed.