

# **DHRPC Moral Identity and Ethical Decision Making**

**Denver HIV Resources Planning Council  
Annual Retreat**

**June 27, 2014**

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**Fabrice Jotterand, PhD, MA  
Associate Professor  
Department of Health Care Ethics  
Regis University**

# Outline

- Challenges of DHRPC
- Organizational Ethics and Ethical Climate
- Good News – Bad News / Moral Agency
- Ethical Decision Making
- Some Recommendations
- Case Study: VA Health Care Facilities

# Challenges of DHRPC

- How to allocate ethically resources to meet the needs of people living with HIV?
  - Conflicting demands
    - Housing vs. food; mental health vs. dental care, etc.
  - Limited resources
    - Budget constraints
  - Competing moral frameworks and values
    - Pluralistic society
    - Political context

# Denver HIV Resources Planning Council

## “Our Mission”

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- “Health Care is a Basic Human Right”

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# Denver HIV Resources Planning Council

## “What we do”

- “The Council sets priorities for the services most needed in the Denver Transitional Grant Area (TGA), decides how much Part A (Title I) money should be used for each of these services (resource allocation), and develops a plan to provide these services (comprehensive plan). These decisions are based on an evaluation of the needs of people living with HIV (needs assessment). The Council also evaluates the administrative efficiency of the allocation of funds.”

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# Challenges of DHRPC

- How to allocate ethically resources to meet the needs of people living with HIV?
  - Standards for prioritizing service categories
  - Assessment of needs
  - Development of a plan to deliver services
    - Assumes particular values about resource allocations
    - What values should guide this process?

# Denver HIV Resources Planning Council

- Discuss in groups of 4-6 people:
  - What are the core values of DHRPC and why?
    - Define these values
  - How should these core values inform the role of DHRPC in allocating funds?
  - What are the implication(s) for DHRPC that “Health Care is a Basic Human Right”?
  - What is the responsibility of DHRPC as a “moral agent” in the community?

# Organizational Ethics

- Goal of Organizational Ethics:
  - Development of “a positive ethical climate”
  - Organizational ethical climate:
    - “It consists of the shared perceptions of the ‘general and pervasive characteristics of [an] organization [of a system] affecting a broad range of decisions’” (Victor & Cullen, 1988, p. 101 cited in Spencer et al, 2000, pp. 5-6)

# Ethical Climate



# HCOs as Moral Agents

- Ability to respect moral rules
- Ability to make moral choices and act accordingly
- Ability to reason about moral issues
- Ability to accept moral responsibility

# HCOs as Moral Agents

- HCOs set goals (mission statements, values, etc.)
- HCOs act as a result of collective decisions
- HCOs are subject to normative evaluation
- HCOs are held accountable for their actions

# Creating a Positive Ethical Climate

- Key factors:
  - Commitment of the leadership
  - Clear statement of the HCO's mission
  - Strategies, structure and policies supporting HCO's mission

# Commitment of the Leadership

- Role of leadership:
  - To provide a vision for the organization
  - To articulate the values defining the organization
  - To contribute to a positive ethical climate

# Leadership Contribution to a Positive Ethical Climate

- Members awareness of ethical or legal issues
- Reporting bad news to management
- Reporting ethical or legal violations
- Refraining from unethical or illegal conduct
- Higher employee commitment to the organization

# Articulating Values

- Values, norms defining an organization are articulated in mission statements, value statements, codes of ethics, etc.
- These statements form the ethical climate of an organization.
- However, policies and day-to-day activities informed by these statements indicates the true nature of the organization's ethical climate.

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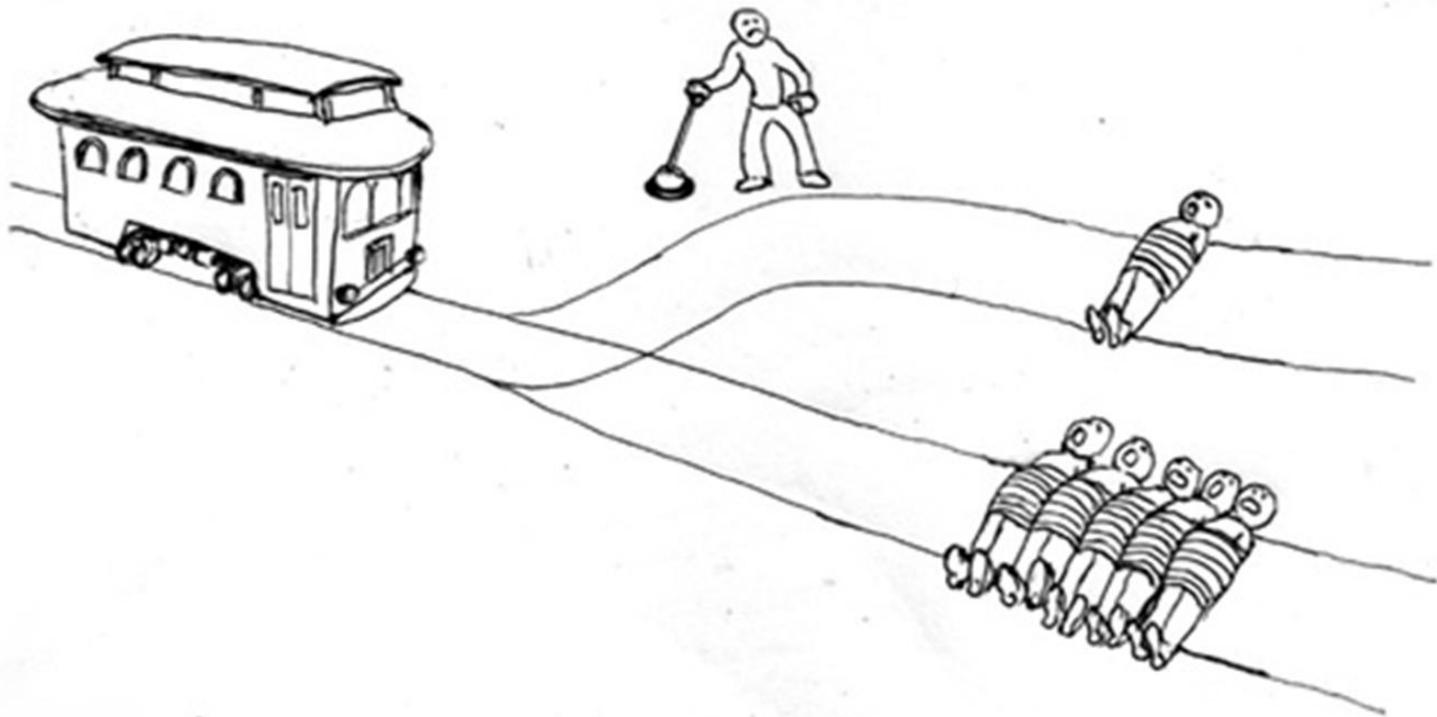
# Good News – Bad News



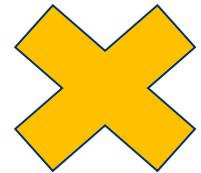
# Good News – **Bad News**



# Trolley Problem



# Moral Agency



# Moral Agency

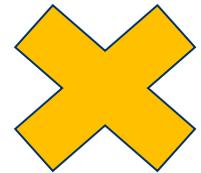
## Character



**Values, Norms  
Guiding Actions**



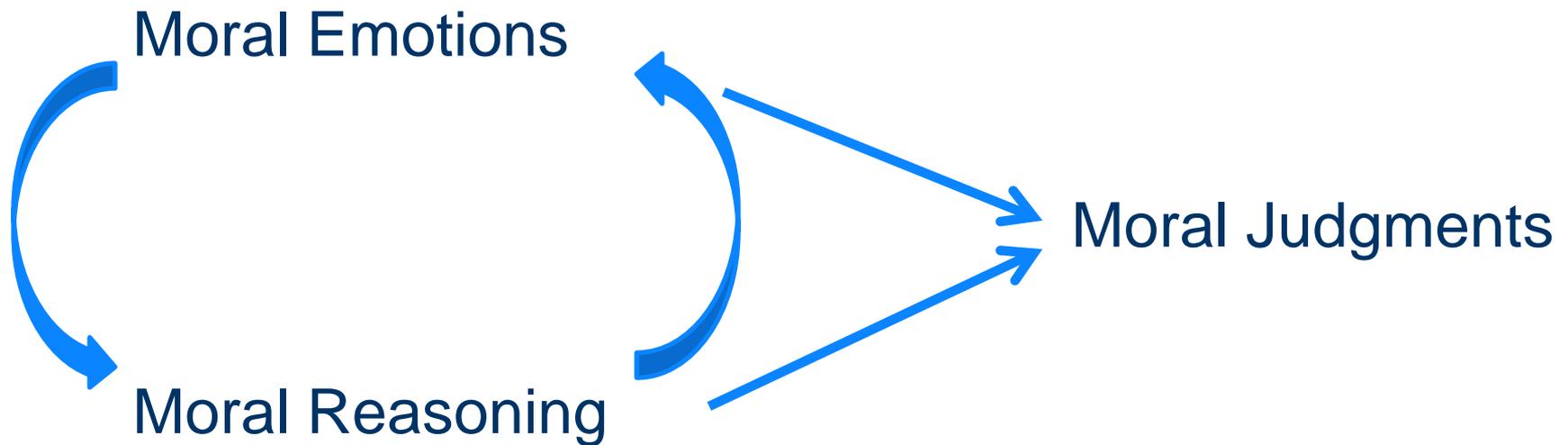
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# Moral Psychology

- Human moral behavior consists of the interaction between:
  - Affective processes – emotions
  - Motivational processes - volition
  - Cognitive processes – reasoning

# Structure of Moral Judgments

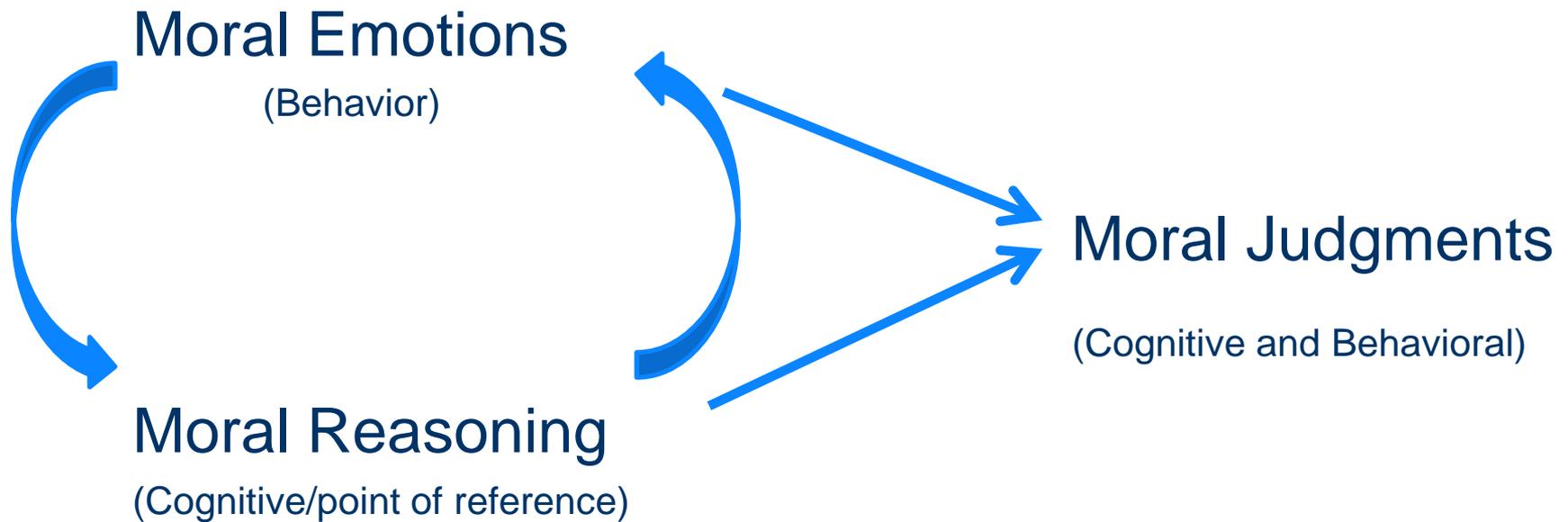


# Moral Capacity & Moral Content

- Moral capacity: ability/disposition to respond morally
  - Affective/motivational processes
  - Moral emotions: determine one's behavioral response to a moral dilemma
- Moral content: particular beliefs, moral actions and ideas
  - Cognitive processes
  - Moral reasoning: influences one's particular psychological/emotional state by attaching particular values during moral judgments

(Sadler, 2008)

# Structure of Moral Judgments



# Some Recommendations

- Develop a robust mission statement (vision, mission, and values)
- Determine core values descriptive of the DHRPC moral identity
- Develop a process (algorithm) to provide a uniform approach to resource allocations
  - DAT Committee
- Provide opportunities for continuing ethics education

# Case Study: VA Health Care Facilities

The Department of Veterans Affairs is facing a major crisis after multiple reports indicated the alleged cover up of preventable deaths (at least 40 veterans died awaiting care at the VA Phoenix facility) and delays in providing timely medical care to veterans. Evidence shows corruption in handling appointment records within the VA system. Wait times have been falsified in medical appointment records. The records, used in annual performance reviews to determine salary raises, bonuses, promotions, etc., have been manipulated to meet the agency's standards of 14 days. For instance, a May report indicates that 1,700 veterans have been kept off the books at a VA Phoenix facility to improve performance figures. Other reports suggest that scheduling staff was ordered by superiors to alter the dates of veterans' requests for appointments.

# Systemic Problems and “Ethical Climate” Challenges

- Systemic failures
  - Shortage of primary care physicians
  - Delayed care due to intricate scheduling system
  - Inability to absorb in the VA system the increasing number of veterans
- Ethical climate challenges
  - Evidence of corruption in handling appointment records
  - reports suggest that scheduling staff was ordered by superiors to alter the dates of veterans’ requests for appointments

# VA's Mission

- “To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise ‘*To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan*’”

# VA's Core Values

- *Integrity*: “act with high moral principle and adhere to the highest professional standards...”
- *Commitment*: “work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries...”
- *Advocacy*: “...advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries...”
- *Respect*: “treat all those I serve...with dignity and respect...”
- *Excellence*: “strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.”

# VA Health Care Facilities

- Breach of many of these core values.
- Leadership needs to create a positive ethical climate that fosters responsible business and patient care practices grounded on the highest moral standards.
- Change will not take place overnight and will require moral courage to implement new standards of conduct among administrators and clinicians.

**Thank You !**  
**Questions? Comments?**

