



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

From conceptual to concrete: learning ethics in a clinical ethics committee for medical students

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Why have a student clinical ethics committee?



Students witness and experience ethical challenges during their placements

An SCEC provides MD students with the opportunity to

- Discuss these ethical challenges
- Experience case consultations
- Develop skills of clinical ethics reasoning for their future practice
- Connect with other students interested in ethics
- Become future leaders in clinical ethics in our health system

Johnston, C. (2016). Roles of Student Ethics Committees in Preparing Future Physicians. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 18(5), 501-505.

Sturman, N., Farley, R. & Jennings, W. (2014). Exploring Medical Student Experiences of Ethical Issues and Professionalism in Australian General Practice. *International Journal of Practice-based Learning in Health and Social Care*, 2(2), 88-95.

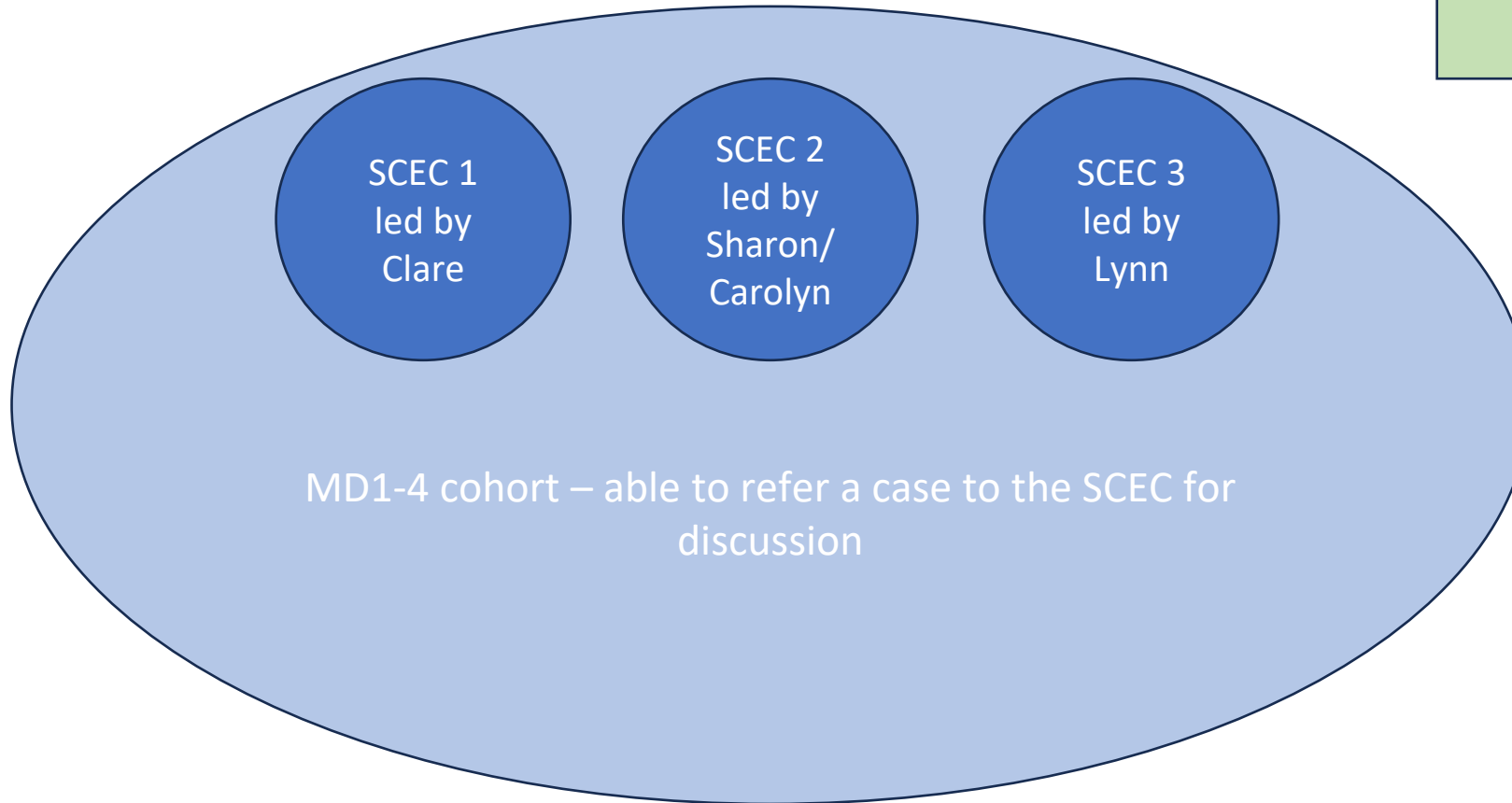
**Our design principle:
Replicate the hospital
clinical ethics
committee experience**



Forming

SCEC working group

A/Prof Ros McDougall, Dept of Surgery (Austin)
Prof Clare Delany, Dept of Medical Education
Prof Lynn Gillam, Dept of Paediatrics
Sharon Feldman, Dept of Surgery (Austin)
Dr Carolyn Johnston, Dept of Surgery (Austin)
Jerry Luo MD4, Austin clinical ethics intern



MD1-4 cohort – able to refer a case to the SCEC for discussion

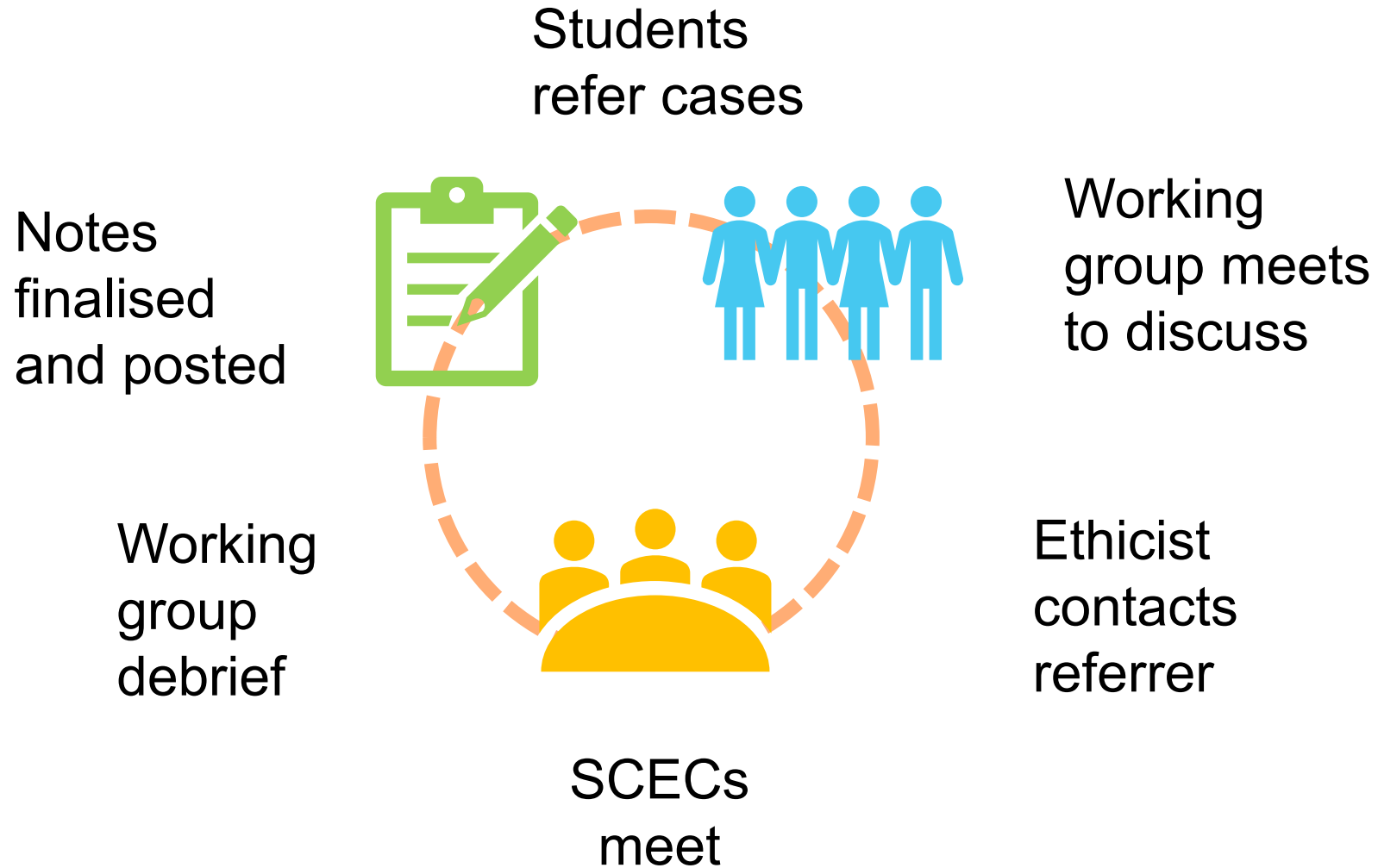
Head of Dept of Medical Education
MD Professional Practice Theme Lead

Resources and communication



⋮	▼ Welcome to SCEC	✓	+	⋮
⋮	📄 Meeting dates and membership groups	✓		⋮
⋮	📄 Terms of reference	✓		⋮
⋮	📄 Complete your confidentiality agreement here	✓		⋮
⋮	📄 Updated zoom link for all SCEC meetings	✓		⋮
⋮	📄 SCEC ethicists	✓		⋮
⋮	📄 Training session recording and article	✓		⋮
⋮	📄 Notetaking	✓		⋮

Meeting cycle



Critical dialogue method

1. Opening Statement

2. Gather and
unpack info

3. Close in on
ethical
question/s

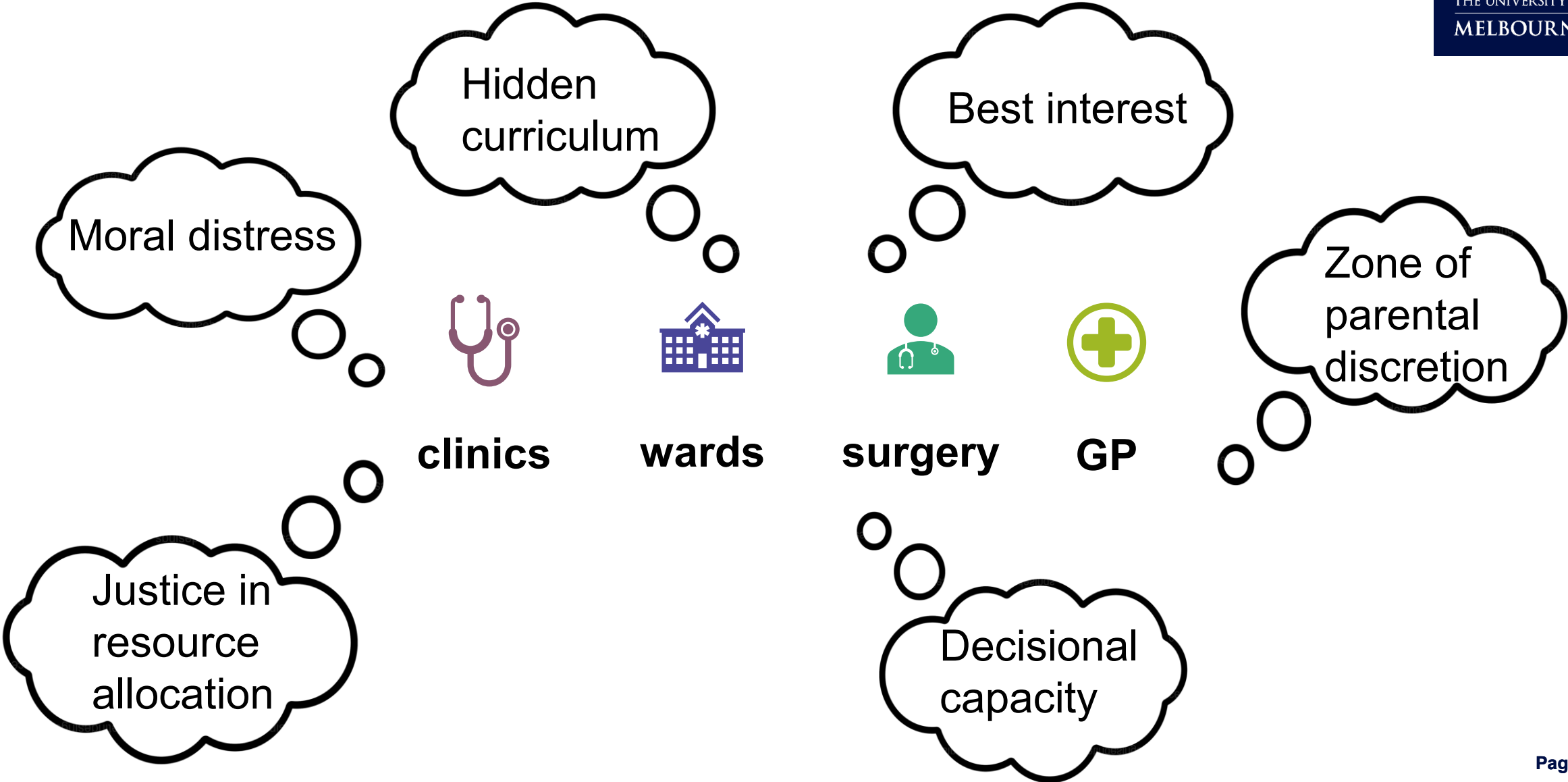
4. Identify
possible options
for proceeding

5. Identify and
evaluate pros
and cons of
each option

6. Weigh up and
balance competing
considerations

**7. Develop an agreed outcome
and how to proceed**

Types of cases



What did students learn?



- To discuss challenging scenarios together, including **listening deeply** to others' views
- Application of their conceptual understanding to concrete specific patient care scenarios; **translating ethical principles into practical outcomes**
- Increased sensitivity to the “hidden curriculum”, alongside **critical reflection**
- **Articulating moral distress** and considering avenues for addressing it.

Themes from focus group evaluation



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Themes from focus group evaluation



Overarching idea was that:
the SCEC facilitated by an ethicist with
experience in ethics
consultations provided a **safe space** for
discussion/interaction across all MD year
levels to:

"I'm always surprised by all the things I haven't thought of...other people's opinions and perspectives...are...so different from mine"

"I... don't have the language to quite articulate my feelings... and being part of the SCEC has helped develop this."

1. **Expand thinking**

Themes from focus group evaluation



SCEC provided a **safe space** to:

2. Develop and practise **skills** of ethical deliberation

- Using an ethics **framework** or set of steps to follow
- through **repeated** discussions

“

“... skills of how to logically break down an ethical case and turn it into a question and work out what the options are”

“...when you have a structure to go through...to dissect an issue, it becomes more apparent”

Framework assisted to apply ethical concepts – step by step. “you need to practice to do [it] automatically...it’s super useful”

“Initially challenging but practice and repetition through meetings ...oh wait... it’s becoming more of a natural conversation now”

Themes from focus group evaluation



SCEC provided a **safe space** to:

3. To **gain greater awareness** of ethical issues

- Even in situations where others don't notice

“I think about ethical decisions a lot more, and their impact”

In conclusion

Comparing our findings to medical education literature –teaching ethics

Well recognised that teaching ethics should:

- involve students in actively thinking about ethical theory linked to clinical or real lifesituations.
- Provide experiential and collaborative learning approaches, where students are supported to actively engage with authentic cases, and reflect on practice in a safe environment.

SCEC achieves these aims:

“It’s the discussion... and applying the... ethical framework rather than...reading some slides...”

