



# SaskEthics

*An Ethics Newsletter for Catholic Healthcare Organizations in Saskatchewan*

## Triage stretches us in mind and spirit

Dear *SaskEthics* Readers,



**A**nother summer has come and gone, and I hope that the fall has you looking for opportunities for ethical reflection.

My own work has become extremely busy after the departure of my colleague, former Saskatoon Health Region ethicist Dr. Qaiser Fahim. During this period while I am the only person hired as a clinical ethicist in the province, I am finding that there is no end to the number of projects and situations that could use an ethicist's touch. Although I'm still not clear on what 'an ethicist's touch' means, I have found that amid the chaos my mind has turned to the ethics of triage situations.

We normally think of triage as a system that should only be used on battlefields or in overloaded emergency rooms, but I am more and more convinced that assigning degrees of urgency to the voices that cry out for our care is a routine part of daily life. The question isn't: Will we have to triage? Rather, it is: What kind of people will we be while we triage?

Healthcare is a place of constant triage, and from my experience, one of the worst habits I can fall into is to think that my busyness is an excuse to be dismissive of the needs of others. I am continually trying to master the art of saying no gracefully, in a way that makes the person on the other end of my reply feel valued. I want people to think of me as someone who cared about them even if I couldn't help.

Some days I am more successful at this than others.

For example, one of the greatest challenges for me is trying to find ways to support people who tend to take a long time to share their stories. I don't have a lot of patience on the best of days, and when I feel like there are "more important places for me to be," I often fall into a trap of cutting people off or minimizing what they are trying to tell me. Some days I feel like I would try anything to speed certain conversations along!

Thankfully, the staff I work with from across the province have shown me that being respectful is possible even in the most chaotic situations. Here are a few tips I have learned on how to make people



St. Paul's Hospital



Catholic Health  
Association of Saskatchewan

feel cared for, even when you don't have time:

- Give them a timeline for when you can get back to them
- Make sure you visit them during a time of day when you feel patient
- Don't try to squeeze them in when you are in a rush – this never ends well!
- If you cannot help them, try to set them in the direction of someone who can

I am sure that many of your teams also have tips about how to manage these moments of triage. Please do not hesitate to send them to me, as even ethicists need ethics help from time to time. But don't worry: I'll understand if I'm low on your priority list 😊

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The poster features a central graphic of a compass rose with a heart at the top, set against a background of stylized mountains. The text on the poster includes: 'FOLLOWING TRUE NORTH', 'Navigating Change as Faith-filled Caregivers', 'Catholic Health Association of Saskatchewan', '75TH ANNUAL CONVENTION', 'October 22 - 23, 2018', 'Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon', and contact information for questions: 'Office Phone: 306-955-CHAS (2427) | Website: www.chassk.ca'.

## Registration is now open for the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual CHAS Convention!

*Speakers include:*

Sr. Nuala Kenny

Rediscovering the Art of Dying:  
Challenges for the Disciples of Christ

Dr. Tracy Trothen

Why values Matter and How Do We  
Know What's Right?: Moral Distress

Gregg Brown

Learning Resilience, Leading Change

Marc Dansereau

Creativity: The Craft that Buys our Grief

**Early Bird Deadline September 30th**

*For more information:*

306-955-CHAS (2427) [www.chassk.ca](http://www.chassk.ca)