

ETHICS COMMITTEES IN LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES IN TEXAS

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Purpose: To determine the existence, purpose, membership, and activities of ethics committees within long-term care facilities in Texas. **Method:** Using a stratified random sampling procedure, Texas counties with licensed long-term care facilities were stratified by county population increments of 50,000 to determine the sample size for each county. Licensed long-term care facilities for each county were then randomized and selected to reach the determined sample size per county. Texas has 254 counties with 209 counties housing licensed long-term care facilities. An investigator-developed survey was mailed to administrators of 485 licensed long-term care facilities. The survey requested information about bed capacity, occupancy rate, type of facility, type of funding, ethics committee organization and functions, common biomedical ethical issues, and interest in developing an ethics committee if one was not present. **Findings:** Data analysis is in process. State data will be compared to findings from an initial study completed in one heavily-populated Texas County, and comparisons between urban and rural areas, facilities with large and small bed capacities and differing occupancy rates, and types of facilities and funding will be highlighted. The most common ethical issues will be determined. Interest in developing an ethics committee will be assessed and used for possible development of educational and support services. **Discussion:** The graying of the American population continues. With higher numbers of older adults residing in southern states, it is imperative that health care institutions in southern states proactively address rising ethical issues. Although ethics committees are rare in long-term care facilities, ethical dilemmas are not. Knowing the status of ethics committees in long-term care facilities is a beginning to further development of mechanisms to address ethical issues. Nurses can initiate development of such committees or other mechanisms in their facilities.