Ethics and Professionalism

While the Maternal Child Health Bureau competencies of ‘Ethics and Professionalism’ may at first appear to be abstract concepts, Dr. Paula Leslie provided a practical framework that delineated the ways in which our personal beliefs and cultural values impact our ethical and professional decisions. In an engaging session, Dr. Leslie introduced three distinct ethical tiers to guide the conversation. The first of these tiers is *values*, or those personal guidelines we all adhere to on an individual basis. Values are ranked in our own systems in order to discern what is most important to us as individuals. The next tier within this model is *morals*. Morals are guided by a society and, in contrast to values, are externally constructed. As members of a greater culture, we adhere to morals in order to guide our thinking about what is right, what is wrong, and what it means to be immoral. The final tier introduced by Dr. Leslie was *ethics*. Within this framework, ethics are professional or group standards that are adhered to when one agrees to be part of a certain organization or group. These are created by the group and all those who participate in this system must follow these larger guidelines. Using this three tiered model, the LEND trainees were challenged to consider hypothetical cases and the values, morals and ethics present in each.

To conclude her lecture Dr. Leslie also explored the medical ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice. These concepts relate to the patient’s ability to make their own choices, the practitioner's responsibility to do good, the practitioner's responsibility to avoid causing harm, and the necessity for care that is fair for the patient. Evidence based-practice was also discussed. Dr. Leslie argued for a three component model, combining the research, clinical knowledge and patient perspective in order to provide the best care possible.,

Dr. Leslie’s lecture and its resulting discussion highlighted the need for LEND trainees to be aware of their personal values, cultural perspectives, and professional standards as they serve patients and their families. Through self-reflection -- a tool at the center of the MCHB leadership competency model -- we have the opportunity to examine our values, morals, and personal biases and to recognize their potential to influence our professional practices. As we strive to deliver family-centered care, we become more sensitive to the personal values and cultural influences of patients and their families. This awareness helps us to better understand patients’ receptivity to and involvement in, treatment recommendations. It also leads to respectful patient-professional communication, which ultimately enhances our effectiveness as clinicians and researchers. Similarly, by understanding the morals, values and professional ethics of colleagues from other disciplines, we are able to contribute to interdisciplinary teams in a way that respects individual team members and their disciplines.