

Administrative versus Clinical Decisions

Decision-making is an integral part of the health care system and there are numerous decisions and varying types of decisions that are made every day in a health care organization. Ombudsman Saskatchewan distinguishes three types of decisions: **administrative, clinical, and hybrid**. **Administrative** and some **hybrid** decisions fall within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. **Clinical** decisions do not.

We use a fairly broad and general definition of the term **clinical** decision making. We view clinical decisions as those directly related to patient care, and that are typically made by a person holding a professional designation in the medical field. Clinical decisions:

- are made using direct information and observation of a patient.
- typically entail specific treatments or interventions that have been or may be delivered to the patient.
- typically focus on diagnosing, treating, and preventing a patient's medical conditions.

Administrative decisions in a public health system are generally decisions related to how health care services are planned, organized and ultimately provided by the system to the public. Administrative decisions are made in all sectors of the health system, but are typically seen in services areas such as corporate and financial services, management and administration, policy and planning, facility management, human resources and information technology.

There is a third type of decision as well, the **hybrid**. These are decisions that involve both clinical and administrative elements. Typically they will involve decisions related to a patient (or a group of patients) and that require the decision maker to have the authority, as well as both a functional knowledge of the programs and services available and specific subject knowledge to match patient need to available service.

The table on the reverse side captures some of the key distinctions between the three.

	Administrative Decisions	Clinical Decisions	Hybrid Decisions
Definition	A decision or series of decisions made about the organization and delivery of health care services	A decision or series of decisions made about a patient, based on direct knowledge and/or observation of the patient, about the specific treatment options and interventions available to that patient	A decision or series of decisions related to a patient's (or group of patients') access to a needed treatment option within a finite period of time
Characteristics	Bound by legislation and regulations and based on policies and procedures	Based on observation and/or knowledge of the patient	Based on knowledge of the patient or group of patients. May be bound by agency policy
	Based on knowledge of the legislation, regulations, policies, and procedures	Based on subject knowledge, expertise and skills	Based on functional knowledge of the program and subject knowledge
	Requires operational authority	Requires professional designation	Requires professional designation and operational authority
	Involves a group of required tasks	Require provision of direct clinical service	Involves a group of required tasks
	Does <u>not</u> require clinical expertise or subject knowledge	Requires clinical expertise and subject knowledge	Requires subject knowledge
Outcome	Efficient and equitable organization of programs and services	Diagnosis, treatment and prognosis (Treatment plan)	Access to needed service based primarily on clinical guidelines but can also be based on individual treatment plans.
Review	Decisions are subject to appeal and correction internally to the agency and externally to oversight bodies or entities	Decisions are subject to review by peer group and or professional association and licensing bodies	Decisions are subject to appeal and correction internally to the agency and externally to oversight bodies or entities

Resources

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McDowell, J et al (2009) Decision-making: initiating insulin therapy for adults with diabetes. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 65 (1).

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Thompson, C et al, Nurses' use of Research Information in Clinical Decisions Making: A Descriptive and Analytical Study.