

Balancing Dignity of Risk with Duty of Care

Dignity of risk and duty of care can appear in practice to be concepts that are at odds. However, they are both an important part of providing person-centred care that respects the rights and wellbeing of an individual.

It is important to find a balance between the professional obligation to protect an individual from harm, whilst also informing their options and respecting their choices.

Dignity of Risk
is the right for an individual to make choices and take risks essential for personal growth, autonomy, empowerment and inclusion.



Promotes autonomy
Encourages choice
Accepts uncertainty



Duty of Care
is the professional obligation to ensure the safety and wellbeing of others by preventing foreseeable harm, providing support, and acting in their best interest.

Prioritises safety
Has potential to limit options
Seeks control



How do we
find the
balance?

Supporting
informed
decision
making!



Practical Approaches to Support Informed Decision Making

- Assess risk and benefits together
- Communicate perceived risks and potential consequences clearly
- Be collaborative and consultative in decision making
- Clearly document with option to review
- Respectfully support an individual's decision
- Recognise power imbalance
- Document own and individual's understanding, and monitor to ensure ethical and legal accountability

Identify the individual's goal or choice



Assess perceived or potential risks



Discuss risks and options with the individual



Agree on a plan balancing autonomy and safety



Communication Tips

- Use plain language
- Employ the teach-back method
- Encourage questions
- Validate concerns
- Allow the individual to come to their own decision based on discussion

Applications in the Disability and Aged Care Sector

Care principles

- Choice and control
- Person-centred support

Examples

- A person choosing to live independently despite potential risks
- A person participating in perceived risky community activities with support

Practitioner/worker role

- Facilitate informed decision making
- Manage and document risks and understanding
- Respect choices

Applications in General Practice

Patient-centred care

- Respecting patient choices in treatment
- Informed consent and shared decision-making

Examples

- A patient refusing treatment
- A patient making lifestyle choices with known health risks

Healthcare provider role

- Educate and advise
- Document risks, patient understanding, and decisions
- Respect choices

Legal and Ethical Frameworks

- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Practice Standards
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Standards
- Health Practitioner Regulation National Law

Key Points

- Informed consent and decision making is critical
- Collaborative practice supports autonomy
- Clear documentation protects both parties

