

TABLE 4-2

RIPS CONCEPTUAL MODEL: FRAMEWORK		
REALMS	INDIVIDUAL PROCESS	SITUATION
Individual	Moral sensitivity	Issue
Organizational	Moral judgment	Problem
Societal	Moral motivation	Dilemma
	Moral courage	Distress
		Temptation

Adapted from Swisher LL. Realm-individual process-situation (RIPS) ethical analysis model. In: Arslanian LE, Davis CM, Swisher LL. *Ethics From the Trenches: Everyday Ethics and the Real World*. Presented at: APTA Combined Sections meeting; February 2004; Nashville, TN.

8. Describe the general nature of the outcome desired or the consequences. Which seems most important in this case—an outcome that is most beneficial for the patient, the family, or your colleagues?
9. Describe pertinent practical features of this situation—one or more of the following: disputed facts, the law, the wishes of the others, resources available, effectiveness and efficiency of action, the risk, your code of ethics and standards of practice, the degree of certainty of the facts on which you base your decision, and the predominant values of the others involved (which may or may not coincide with predominant values in US health care).

When all of the pertinent aspects that go into this particular decision are laid out before you, you must use your discernment to decide which action is the highest moral alternative. You should be able to justify your decision by explaining your ethical reasoning process and your conscious weighing of one value over another in this situation based on what you know about your moral character; the virtues, traditions, and beliefs that frame your choices in life; and your professional ethical mandates.

APPLICATION OF THE SUGGESTED PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

Let's take an example first of an ethical situation that involves the expectation of a kickback or gift in exchange for referring patients.

An occupational therapist certified in hand therapy visits a local orthopedic hand surgery practice with information about her skills and her practice in hopes of educating the physicians and office staff about the benefits of referring their patients to her for rehabilitation. She is told by the receptionist that unless she was prepared to offer regular golf outings at the local country club, she could not compete with the local physical therapist who got there before she did, although he was not board certified.

This surely is an ethical problem. Let's apply the problem-solving process to the case. The facts are that a highly qualified hand therapist would like to receive referrals from an orthopedic surgery practice, but she is told she must give a kickback, or pay for the referrals, in competition with another therapist who at face value seems less qualified to help the patients than she is based on advanced certification. Another fact is that kickbacks are against the law. But, unlike pharmaceutical manufacturers and medicine, exactly what constitutes a kickback and what constitutes an expense associated with promoting one's business has not been clearly delineated by physical or occupational therapy organizations.

Going to Table 4-2, we decide that the principal realm involved here is organizational. The ethical situation is between the occupational therapist and the orthopedic practice or the organization. The individual process required is one of moral courage or implementation. The occupational therapist is motivated to want to work for change but will need the courage to report this infraction and still remain in her mind a viable therapist in the community. The situation would be one of distress. She may be tempted to just look away and not make waves and thus protect her business, but she knows that what is going on currently is unethical, illegal, and not good for patients. She knows what she must do, but she has to