Student Resource 5.8

Scenarios: Distribution of Scarce Resources

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Before you view a presentation on the distribution of scarce resources, read through the following scenarios and decide if you think they are ethical or not. After you view the presentation, determine which principle or principles are being used in each scenario.

Scenario 1

An NGO has obtained a stock of drugs to treat HIV in African countries. There are thousands of people dying from HIV each year. The NGO’s staff decides to use their medications to treat HIV-positive pregnant women so that their children will be less likely to be born with HIV.

Do you think this is an ethical decision? Why or why not?

Which principle or principles guided that decision?

Scenario 2

An obese woman visits a doctor and requests gastric bypass surgery, a procedure that alters the process of digestion and can help people lose weight. She explains that she doesn’t like to diet and she’s too tired to exercise, so she thinks the surgery will help. The doctor examines her and agrees that she needs to lose weight but refuses to do the surgery. The doctor explains that the surgery will not solve her weight problem unless she also makes an effort to watch what she eats and takes time to exercise. He tells her to begin a diet and exercise regimen and return to him in six months if she has not seen any results from those efforts.

Do you think this is an ethical decision? Why or why not?

Which principle or principles guided that decision?

Scenario 3

A massive tornado tore through Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee in April 2011, leaving dozens of people dead and many homes and businesses destroyed. Tuscaloosa, one of the largest cities in Alabama, was one of the hardest hit places. The tornado went through the center of town, where it flattened buildings, killed people, and left thousands without electricity.

The University of Alabama is located in Tuscaloosa. It is a large campus, and while many of its students suffered tremendously because of the tornado, some campus buildings were undamaged. Many people gathered at the university because they had nowhere else to go. While there were many towns in need of assistance, volunteer groups decided to begin distributing aid and relief supplies at the university first.

Do you think this is an ethical decision? Why or why not?

Which principle or principles guided that decision?

Scenario 4

In the United States, organ donation is managed by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), a nonprofit overseen by the federal government. UNOS maintains a national waiting list of all people who are waiting to receive organs. When an organ becomes available, UNOS uses computer software to determine which people on the waiting list are matches for that organ. UNOS notifies the medical teams for those people and the transplant is arranged. UNOS distributes organs on the basis of that biological match—whether a person is rich or poor, young or old, does not matter as much as having the right match so that the transplant will be more likely to be successful.

Do you think this is an ethical decision? Why or why not?

Which principle or principles guided that decision?