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## The need for ethics. Professional perspectives on work and health.

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**Background.** On a daily basis professionals working in occupational health and in social insurance medicine have to deal with situations that give ethical food for thought. For example, clients do not act on guideline-based medical advice for quick recovery; employees are absent from work due to problems in their personal lives; privacy constraints hinder effective solutions. Professional issues are also at stake. Communication with attending physicians fails, their professional judgements can be contradictory, or professional views about who is responsible differ.

**Purpose.** Conflicting interests, also in terms of moral values, seem to be inherently connected to occupational health and social insurance practice. These conflicts are sharper and more complicated than they are in regular health care. The purpose of this study is to describe the multiple loyalties, in particular towards one's client, the customer / employer, one's employer, and society as a whole, as experienced by the professionals themselves, from an ethical perspective.

**Methods.** We have interviewed in-depth 32 health care professionals, working in occupational health and social insurance, as well as in regular health care: family doctors and other health professionals. **Results.** We analysed the attitudes and background beliefs of these professionals, in particular their prevailing views on their professional role and their stance towards professional guidelines. Although most of the respondents acknowledge that professionals should judge consistently and uniformly, they differ in the way and to the extent in which they claim professional freedom, necessary to make their own balancing and independent judgements.

**Discussion.** We assess these different perspectives, the given justifications, and ask what possible contributions ethics can make. A promising solution might be the development of value-based guidelines (see parallel GIN-abstract 2009). This study is part of a larger project funded by the Netherlands organisation for health research and development (ZonMw).