

An Intro to Medical Ethics

based on XIII International Intensive Course in
Bioethics

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Objectives

- To define ethics and introduce how it applies to clinical medicine
- To discuss the fundamental principles of ethics
- To review approaches to ethical decision making



**Dr. Sorensen
relaxing after a long
day.**



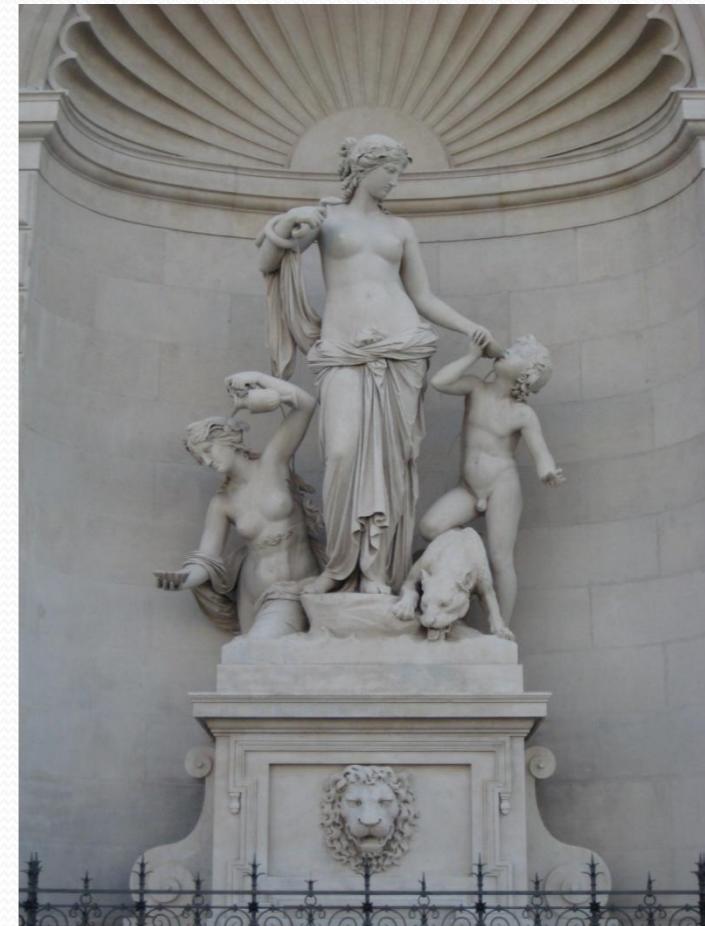
Ethics



- Definition
 - The awareness of right and wrong in human actions
 - The systemic study of norms and values that justify/determine good and bad in human action
 - Principles of conduct that distinguish between “right” and “wrong”

Ethics

- Traditionally addressed by humanistic disciplines such as
 - Philosophy
 - Religious studies
 - Law
 - Social science



Controversial Issues

- Beginning and end of life
- In vitro fertilization
- Stem cell research
- Human cloning (therapeutic and reproductive)
- Organ transplantation
- Human and animal experimentation

Medical Ethics

- In dealing with a medical problem...
 - Medical question
 - “Can we...?”
 - Ethical question
 - “Should we...?”



Medical Ethics

- Bioethics
 - The identification, analysis and resolution of moral problems that arise from the context of the advancement of biomedical science and technology
- Clinical Ethics
 - The identification, analysis and resolution of moral problems that arise in the clinical care of patients

Clinical Ethics

- A practical discipline that provides a structured approach to assist physicians in identifying, analyzing, and resolving moral problems (ethical issues) that arise in the care of a particular patient

Clinical Ethics

- Why are ethical dilemmas more frequent and more difficult?
 - Changing doctor-patient relationship
 - Improved technology
 - Cost containment

Clinical Ethics

- Relies upon the conviction that even when circumstances are difficult and emotional...
 - Physicians + nurses and patients + families can work together to
 - Identify, analyze and resolve many of the ethical problems that arise in clinical medicine

Clinical Ethics

- Occasionally...
 - Physicians and patients (or family members) may
 - Disagree about values
 - Face choices that challenge their values
 - This is when ethical problems arise.

Lynn in Venice.



Fundamental Principles of Ethics

- Autonomy
- Beneficence
- Non-Maleficence
- Justice (fairness)



Autonomy

- The duty to respect the patient's wishes
- Cornerstone of the saying “Treat others as you would want them to treat you”
- Human beings should never be treated as only a means to an end.
 - They are ends in themselves and have inherent value or worth.

Autonomy

- Kant (philosopher in 1700's)
 - If an action is not done with the motive of duty, then it is without moral value
 - Every action should have pure intention behind it; otherwise it is meaningless
 - Did not necessarily believe that the final result is the most important aspect of an action, but that how the person felt while carrying out the action is the time at which value was set to the result

Autonomy

- Also the basis of numerous other moral concepts
 - Confidentiality
 - Freedom of choice
 - Accountability
 - Avoidance of conflict of interest
 - Informed consent
- Embedded in these principles is the ability of individuals to be autonomous in making their decisions.

Informed Consent

- Idea that a person must be fully-informed about and understand the potential benefits and risks of their choice of treatment
- An uninformed person is at risk of mistakenly making a choice not reflective of his or her values or wishes.

Assent vs Consent

- Assent
 - To express acceptance of an opinion or proposal
 - To agree
- Consent
 - Agreement to an action based on knowledge of what the action involves and its likely consequences

Beneficence

- The duty of performing actions that benefit the patient or which promote the wellbeing of others
- Emphasizes “enhancing”
 - Kindness
 - Charity
 - Welfare of others

Beneficence

- Elevates our acts of charity to a moral obligation without committing harm to others in the process
- Intertwined with that of non-maleficence and at times the two are lumped together

Conflicts

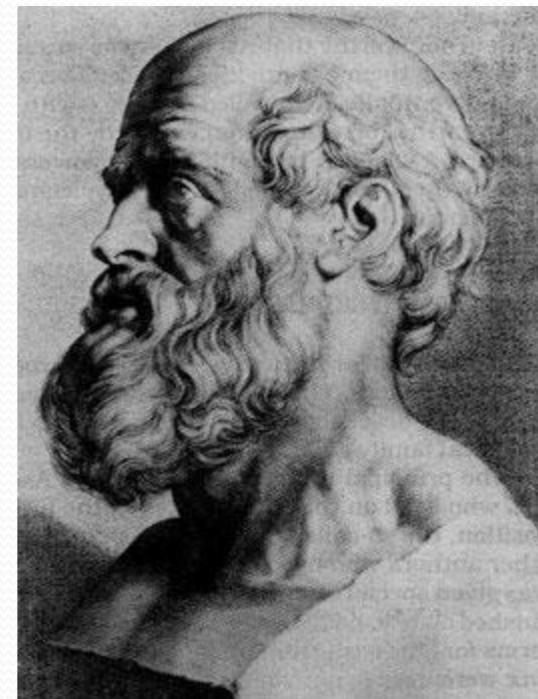
- Autonomy can come into conflict with Beneficence when patients disagree with recommendations that health care professionals believe are in the patient's best interest.
- When the patient's interests conflict with the patient's welfare, different societies settle the conflict in a wide range of manners.

Conflicts

- Western medicine
 - Defers to the wishes of a mentally competent patient
 - Even if the medical team believes that he is not acting in his own best interests
- However, many other societies prioritize beneficence over autonomy.

Non-Maleficence

- The principle of not inflicting evil or harm to others
- Primum non nocere or “First, Do No Harm”



Non-Maleficence

- Is the primary admonition of the Hippocratic Oath
 - Physician ought not to inflict
 - Pain
 - Suffering
 - Distress (physical or psychological)
 - Loss of freedom
 - Disability and death
- An individual should not deprive others from pleasure and happiness by restricting “autonomy.”

Non-Maleficence

- Frankena (1963) prioritizes “beneficence” as follows
 - 1st- not to inflict harm
 - 2nd- to prevent harm
 - 3rd- to remove harm
 - 4th- to promote good
- A physician’s obligation to his patients, to “promote their good,” is less important than to prevent their harm.

Justice

- The principle of distributing benefits, risks, and costs fairly
- “Justice” and “Fairness” are terms used to signify equality of treatment of each person before an obligation or an authority.
- Thought to come from Aristotle
 - “Equals ought to be treated equally and unequals unequally.”



Justice

- From this principle stems the concept of
 - Utilitarianism
 - “The greatest good for the greatest number of people”
- Western culture of moral obligations to help those less fortunate

Other Important Definitions

- Compassion
 - Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it
- Empathy
 - Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives

Sheela in Venice.

The famous Carnavale di Venezia is based on the same religious celebrations and traditions of Mardi Gras.

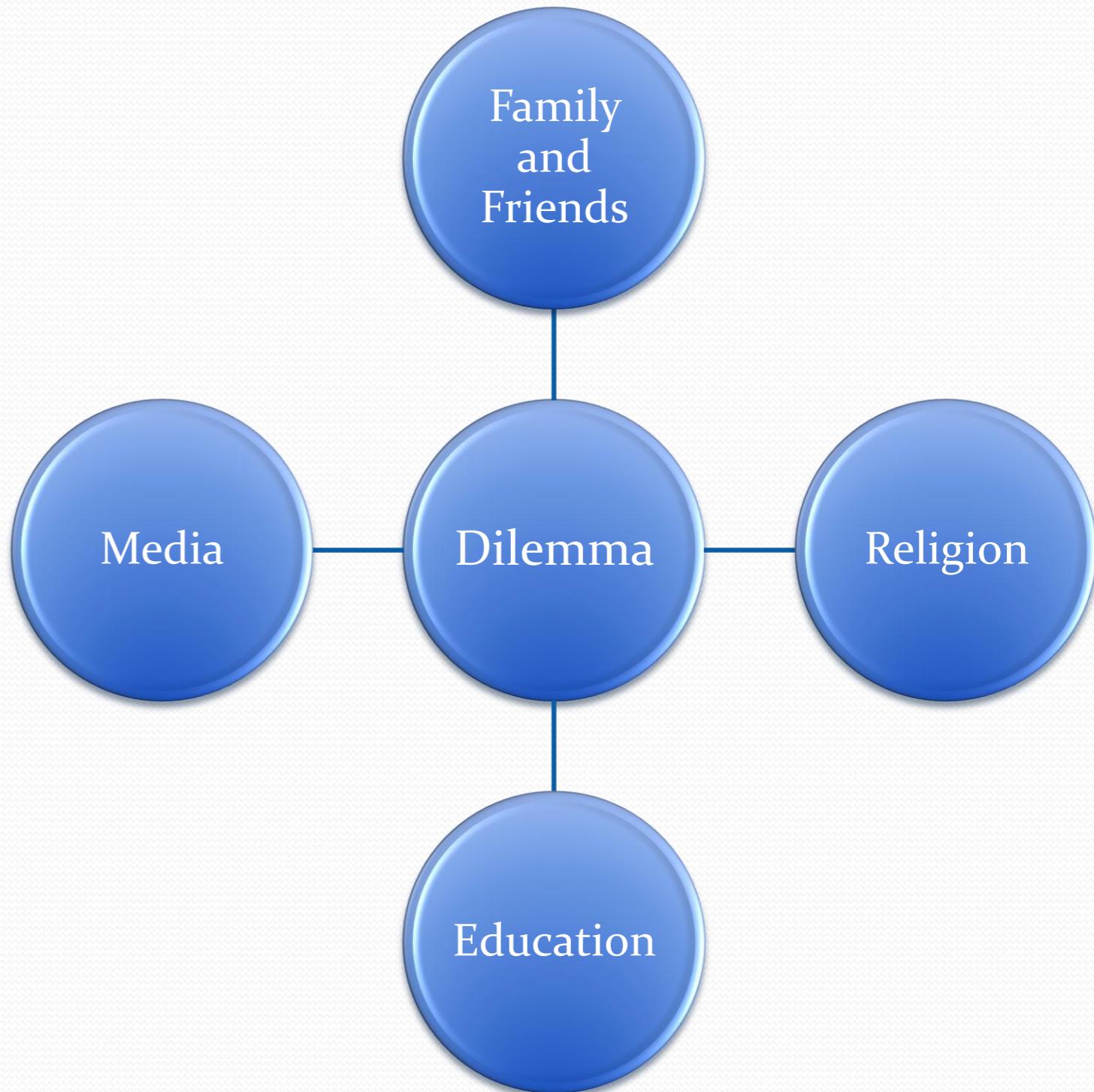


Ethical Decision Making

- This is the hardest part of all!
- It is important to keep in mind the 4 principles of ethics.
- We often make moral choices daily without necessarily referring to any given set of ethical principles.

Ethical Decision Making

- It is also important to know that there are many other influences on our decision making.



Ethical Decision Making

- We learn about moral values and decisions through personal experiences of:
 - Benefit/harm
 - Respect/lack of respect
 - Honesty/dishonesty
 - Fairness/unfairness
 - Confidentiality/breach of confidentiality
- We learn as we get older by experiencing how our actions affect others and how the action of others in turn affects us.



Ethical Decision Making

- When faced by a problem with choices in which there is no clear or obvious difference between right and wrong
 - There must be a decided way to solve these ethical problems.



Ethical Decision Making

- Shared decision making
 - Clinician and consultants
 - Nurses
 - Patient/family and their advisors
- Establish goals of therapy
 - Cure
 - Care
 - Palliation
- Look at ways to achieve these goals



Ethical Decision Making

- Dealing effectively with an ethical problem depends on
 - Recognizing the ethical issue
 - Applying the relevant knowledge
 - Analyzing the problem
 - Deciding on a course of action
 - Implementing the necessary steps to improve the situation

Ethical Decision Making

- 4 basic components
 1. Understand the problem
 - Collect relevant information
 - Scientific
 - Cultural
 - Sociological
 - Psychological
 - Review the problem and proposed course of action
 - What is the issue?
 - What is the conflict?
 - Who must make the decision?

Ethical Decision Making

2. Identify (and prioritize) the “parties” involved
 - Who is involved in the situation?
 - Patient(s)
 - Family
 - Community
 - Health personnel
 - What values does each party have?
 - What immediate priorities does each of the parties have?
 - Religion
 - Customs
 - Norms of the society/laws

Ethical Decision Making

3. Identify the “ethical” principles involved

- Categorize the problems, questions, and issues within the four ethical principles
 - Will help to separate major ethical issues from auxiliary ones
- Prioritize the Ethical Principles for that specific case

Ethical Decision Making

4. Clarify all the possible solutions
 - Consider alternative rankings and alternative solutions.
 - Poor decision making often occurs as a result of bias and ignorance.
 - It is important to be open minded and consider different points of view.
 - Then, propose a solution and defend it well!

Conflict

- Avoiding/resolving conflict
- Requires:
 - Good communication
 - Patience
 - Time-limited goals
 - Medical consultation
 - Ethics consultation
 - Legal consultation
 - Court-hopefully not needed!



**LSU representatives
at the Gala.**



Summary

- Remember the 4 principles of ethics and the 4 components to ethical decision making.
- There are many influences on ethical decision making.
- A systematic approach is helpful but it may be necessary to consider other alternatives for a possible solution.