Bioethics: Traditional Principles and Modern Day Dilemmas

Pediatric Grand Rounds

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Objectives

• Engage in dialogue regarding bioethics of current-day ethical dilemmas
• Participate in review of core principles of ethics
• Discuss how personal values and morals influence professional ethical decision-making
• Discuss approaches to medical ethical decision-making
• Appreciate the beauty of Scilla (and all of…) Italy!
Sofia Vergara
The Story…

• Sofia Vergara, 42-year-old actress, and then-fiancé, Nick Loeb, conceived two female embryos in November 2013 via in vitro fertilization.

• Google images
The Story Continues…

- Prior to conceiving these embryos, the couple had failed to conceive a child via two surrogates.
- Though Vergara has a son, Manolo, Loeb has no children.
The Story Continues…

• Unfortunately, the couple split up in May 2014.

• Loeb is now suing Vergara to prevent her from destroying their embryos.

• He would like to have them implanted in a surrogate and bring them to term.

The Question

Does Sofia Vergara have the right to destroy embryos conceived with then-fiancé Nick Loeb?

A. Yes
B. No
C. Hmm... I’m not sure...
The Question

Does Nick Loeb have the right to implant embryos conceived with then-fiancé Sofia Vergara?

A. Yes
B. No
C. Hmm... I’m not sure...
Loeb believes “life begins at fertilization”. Do these embryos constitute life?

A. Yes  
B. No  
C. Hmm... I’m not sure...
Review of Our Experience

• Day 1: Ethics, bioethics, professional ethics, and research-ethics
• Day 2: Good and reliable communication in medicine
• Day 3: The bioethical conflict in the elderly
• Day 4: The fragile individual at the beginning and the end of life
• Day 5: Healthcare priorities (allocation of resources)
What is Ethics?

• Ethics- study of morality
  • Morality- the “value dimension” of human decision-making and behavior
  • Knowing and doing

• Bioethics (and its branch, medical ethics) raises questions about physician behavior and decision-making, not just scientific or technical questions
  • Values, rights, responsibilities, virtues
  • “Good vs bad” and “right vs wrong”

Why Study Ethics?

• Ethics is integral to medicine
  • Hippocrates (5th cent. BC): concept of medicine as a profession
  • A physician makes a public promise that patients’ interests will be placed above the physician’s own interests

• Ethics prepares you to recognize difficult situations and to handle them in a rational and principled manner

Why Study Ethics?

- Medical ethics itself has been influenced by advances in human rights
  - International human rights agreements provide a basis for ethics that is acceptable across diverse national and cultural boundaries
- Ethics is closely associated with the law
  - Not identical
  - Ethics provides higher standards of behavior
  - Laws may differ from one country to another

Who Decides What is Ethical?

- Ethics is *pluralistic*
- Decisions vary from one society to another
  - And may vary within a society
- Most agree on basic fundamental principles
- World Medical Association (1947)
  - 1948– Declaration of Geneva
- National medical organizations

**References:**
Principles of Ethics
The 4 Principles of Biomedical Ethics

Autonomy
Beneficence
Non-maleficence
Justice

Where do we start?
Approaching an Ethical Situation

1. Identify the problem
   • Be specific and objective
   • Ask yourself if it is an ethical, legal, professional, or clinical problem
     • Identify your own, personal moral obligations and duties

2. Determine the nature and dimensions of the dilemma
   • Decide which moral principles (autonomy, nonmaleficience, beneficence, justice) apply
   • Which principle takes priority?

Approaching an Ethical Situation

3. Generate potential courses of actions
4. Consider the consequences
   • For all those involved
   • Discard those options which do not give desired results OR cause more problematic consequences
   • Regard balance between reason and emotion
5. Consult with professional colleagues, review boards, code of ethics
   • They may identify other issues and aspects you miss or are not interpreting objectively

Let’s consider one more case...
Our Next Story…A Country Divided

- A 10-year-old female in Paraguay was brought to the hospital on April 21 with a stomach ache

- After examination and evaluation, it was determined that the girl was pregnant

- The pregnancy is a result of rape by her stepfather

A Country Divided

• Amnesty International (and the mother) are asking for an abortion for the patient

• …which has been denied by the government

Abortion Laws Worldwide

The Question

Is the pregnancy a danger to this girl’s health?

A. Yes, definitely

B. No

C. I’m not sure

The Question

Who should make the decision as to whether an abortion is appropriate or not?

A. The government
B. The patient’s mother (fetus’s grandmother)
C. The patient
D. I’m not sure
The Question

Does the unborn fetus have rights?

A. Yes
B. No
C. I’m not sure
The Question

Should this patient be allowed to have an abortion?

A. Yes
B. No
C. I’m not sure

Does knowing the patient was 21 weeks pregnant when the pregnancy was noted change your mind?
Lessons Learned...

• Often, there is no right or wrong answer
• These decisions often are best made in groups
  • Varied opinions matter!
  • Use your ethics board!
• Although our cultures and understanding of bioethics may differ, we all share the common goal of caring for the patient’s best interest
And there was gelato!
Any questions?

Thank you!

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Scilla, Italy